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PORTRAIT OF PASCAL

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By MARY DUCLAUX
(A. MARY F. ROBINSON)

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BAUDELAIRE.

" Pour faire d'un homme un saint, il faut bien que ce soit la grâce ; et qui en doute ne sait ce que c'est que saint, et qu'homme."

PASCAL, *Pensées,* fr. 508.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	PASCAL'S BOYHOOD	13
II.	"LA PETITE PASCAL"	26
III.	ROUEN	33
IV.	THE NEW ARCHIMEDES	57
V.	JACQUELINE'S VOCATION	69
VI.	VANITY FAIR	91
VII.	A NIGHT IN NOVEMBER	108
VIII.	PORT-ROYAL-IN-THE-FIELDS	116
IX.	THE "PROVINCIAL LETTERS"	129
X.	THE HOLY THORN	142
XI.	THE LAST "PROVINCIAL LETTERS"	154
XII.	THE TURN OF A WHEEL	161
XIII.	PASCAL'S GETHSEMANE	168
XIV.	JACQUELINE REAPPEARS AND DISAPPEARS	179
XV.	A DISPUTE AMONG FRIENDS	191
XVI.	"LES PENSÉES"	200
XVII.	THE LAST PHASE	211
	INDEX	230

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PORTRAIT OF PASCAL

CHAPTER I

PASCAL'S BOYHOOD

I DARE not attempt a Life of Pascal: to read the secret of that extraordinary genius one would require to be a master of physics, a mathematician, a student of theology and something of a saint. I see him only from the outside, as the painter sees his model—and I see him not entirely; just one side of him, just as much as my intent and patient gaze can absorb. So much is not all; it is very far from being all. But I see him very vividly: a noble, enchanting, insupportable being—whom sometimes I adore and sometimes almost dislike. If I could put on paper what I see, I should have enlarged my countrymen's knowledge of France. Pascal is the French Apostle. Germany has Luther, Spain Saint Teresa, Italy Saint Francis, England Wesley. But imagine a Dr. Donne who at the same time should be a sort of Isaac Newton: such was Pascal.

Pascal was a man of an amazing genius: rare combination, he was also a saint; that is to say, he possessed the two most inexplicable, the most mysterious, the most gratuitous, of all the gifts which, at long intervals, lift some human being a head and shoulders above the multitude: Genius and Spirituality. But, even a man of genius, even a saint, though thus gloriously differentiated from

his fellows, springs from the common stock, is born of human parents, belongs to a race, a country, a period, and is influenced by these accidents of time and space, at least to some extent, and, though there is much that we cannot hope to explain in his history, there is something that we may seek to understand.

The Pascals were a well-to-do and numerous family in Auvergne, branching out into many cousins and collaterals. Pascal's grandfather, Martin Pascal, Paymaster-General for the district of Riom, had been raised to the rank of Gentleman, entitled to bear arms, as a reward for his services in the administration of the province. The Revenue Office and the local magistrature continued to absorb the energies of several younger members of the family, among whom, in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, Pascal's father was certainly the most remarkable. He was President of the Court of Exchequer at Clermont-Ferrand in 1623, when his son was born. Hard-headed, strong-minded, obdurate, capable of the most passionate devotion, intellectual, and with a decided bent for mathematical science, Etienne Pascal, to the English mind, seems more like a Scotchman than a son of France. But the Celts of Auvergne are a good deal like the Scots, just as the Bretons often remind us of the Cornish and the Irish.

These Pascals were people of importance. Our Pascal, the genius, was careful to sign himself Esquire, or, if he wrote in Latin, *Patricius Arvernus*. He was proud of being a gentleman, and proud of

being an Auvergnat, for his was a proud nature. His mother's people came of modest yet substantial merchant stock. We know very little about this poor girl, Antoinette Bégon, save that she married at eighteen and died at twenty-eight. She had already one little girl, Gilberte, when, on June 19, 1623, her son was born. He was christened Blaise, after his great-grandfather.

There is a singular tale about Blaise Pascal's babyhood. I can easily imagine what Freud would have to say about it, but let us put Freud out of our minds and look at the matter quite simply. When Pascal was about a year old he had an illness. Had he been bitten by a dog or cat ? Had some inconsiderate nurse bathed the babe in water too hot or too cold ? We cannot tell, but it is said that the very sight of water threw the child into violent convulsions. And not only water ! Nothing enraged him so much as to see his father and mother (still quite young married people) approach each other, or stand lovingly together by his cradle : who knows but a kiss might have killed him ? Perhaps a dim remembrance of this childish illness may have lain at the base of that jealous horror of marriage, that distaste for all endearments, which was to haunt Pascal in later years, which he, naturally maybe attributed to an enthusiasm for virginity.

To return to the sick babe—after eleven months of screaming and protest, he fell into such a state of languor that he seemed at death's door. And the people in the market-place began to murmur that President Pascal's little boy was certainly bewitched.

When I lived in Auvergne twenty-five years ago the peasants still believed in sorcery and preferred the wise woman's spell to the potions of the doctor. And so the peasants did then; but not Etienne Pascal, a man of high culture and strong mind, an enthusiast for Bacon and for Galileo; nor his intelligent and pious young wife. But the child lay there dying. And one of Madame Pascal's poor pensioners was supposed to be the witch. One day, to the astonishment of these enlightened parents, she confessed her crime: she had "overlooked" the baby.

"'What!' cried my grandfather (writes Marguerite Périer in her *Memoirs*), 'you say my only son must die?'

"She said there was no help for it unless some other would lay down his life for him.

"'No,' said President Pascal, 'better let the baby die than take a life.'

"She then said that the life of a beast would serve her turn, and my grandfather offered his horse, but she took a cat that was in the room and threw it out of the window; it fell but a matter of six feet, yet it reached the ground stone dead." [1]

Three or four days later, the President entering the nursery found his son smiling in his mother's arms, happily engaged in pouring water from one glass into another. The counter-charm had worked, and Blaise was already busy on his first hydraulic experiment. But that mysterious languor, that morbid jealousy of the infant who could not endure to see his mother kissed, will more than once return in the history of Pascal, while the protests and

[1] *Mémoire de la Vie de M. Pascal*, écrit par Mademoiselle Périer sa nièce. See vol. i, *Œuvres de Blaise Pascal*, edition Hachette, and *Etudes*, Victor Cousin.

vehemence of the barely conscious infant appear to forecast the combative career of the man.

More than one biographer of Pascal has been struck by this incident, but none has summed up its significance so eloquently as M. Fortunat Strowski in the second volume of his *Pascal et son temps*.

"A spell was cast over Pascal in his childhood, and the charm lingered into his manhood; it was one no witch might remove; no beast could by its sacrifice free the victim from the effects of a mind too strong, a soul too great, and too piercing a view of human duty and the exigencies of truth. This inner fatality condemned Pascal to finish nothing, and sheds over his work the melancholy that belongs to ruins, and especially to these saddest of all ruins, the fragments of a great thing left incomplete."

When Pascal was three years old, his sister Jacqueline was born, she who was to be to him the twin-sister of his soul. The baby was still in her swaddling clothes when young Madame Pascal died, leaving three orphans, Gilberte, Blaise and Jacqueline, henceforth the sole joy, the pride, the incessant preoccupation of their widowed father. Like Racine, like Madame de Sévigné, Pascal was to grow up with no experience of a mother's love, yet never was any childhood more carefully watched over, more intimately bathed in fond affection. When Blaise was seven years old and Jacqueline less than five, their father threw up his post as President of the Court of Exchequer in order to give himself entirely to his children's education; the two younger ones had inherited their mother's delicacy (indeed, the boy had already shown symptoms of some glandular swellings in the abdomen); perhaps a

milder climate would suit them better than this keen mountain air ? So mused the President, and perhaps consulted the elder girl, Gilberte, already his companion. At last he sold his commission to his brother for a comfortable sum of money, which he then placed in the new Municipal Loan of the city of Paris, recently organized by Cardinal Richelieu. Why should he not follow his money and take up his abode in the capital ? Nothing any longer bound him to Clermont. He might live in Paris, make acquaintance with several men of science whose names inspired him with respect, with some of whom he was already in correspondence ; and surely in that seat and centre of learning he would be still better able to educate his children.

To Paris, accordingly, the Pascals went, when Blaise had reached that age of reason, seven years old, when curiosity is ripe and thought begins to awaken. Neither he nor his sisters ever had any other schoolmaster than their father. The President had a system of teaching all his own : his principle was that a child's lesson should always be such as he can easily, immediately and thoroughly grasp and understand—" sa principale maxime était de tenir cet enfant audessus de son ouvrage." He never would attempt to strain or cram a willing mind—and Blaise Pascal's was a very willing mind, hard to contain within the limits of his father's theory. The boy was extraordinarily quick and reflective. He had few regular studies. His questions and his father's answers, as they walked the streets of Paris, constituted a perpetual course of history, and,

still more, an incessant inquiry into the origin and nature of things in general, their properties and uses, with the story of recent discoveries. There was to be no Latin until the child should have reached the age of twelve (and Blaise Pascal was never an elegant Latinist), there were to be no mathematics until the boy should have mastered not only Latin but Spanish and Italian, for Italy was still the fount of knowledge in science as in art, and Galileo, in Florence, the hero of the scientific world.

In 1630 Etienne Pascal was a man just over forty, who had been brought up on the Essays of Montaigne (of which the complete edition saw the light in the very year of his birth), and whose young enthusiasm had taken fire in 1620 with the publication of Bacon's *Novum Organum*: that is to say, he was a fervent believer in experimental science. No Jesuits for him! No royal roads to learning—Experiment, experiment everywhere, and a fig for the schools and their traditions! The training that he gave his children was based on physical notions, and on the Bible, of which book he was a devout and faithful student, teaching it to his son and daughters as he had learned it from his father before him.

The little girls shared, to some extent, their brother's studies, learned a little Latin, and were soon expert in the history of France, while Blaise began to fret that he was taught no mathematics. Accustomed to glean his knowledge from conversation, he got some inkling from the talk of his father's friends—just so much as to make him long for more,

and, since his education had taught him to look out for himself, to reason, observe and deduce, he determined, untaught, to try his hand at the forbidden science. So one day, Etienne Pascal, entering the stone-floored schoolroom, saw his son, a lad of twelve, stooping over the flags, on which he was tracing certain figures with a fragment of burnt stick. " You see, sir, these are rounds (he explained) and these are strokes," then, combining them in various manners, the boy showed his father how the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles. Tears of joy started to the eyes of the President : Blaise Pascal had re-invented the 32nd proposition of Euclid ! Thenceforth the embargo was removed, and the lessons were livelier than ever, for the President was a fervent mathematician and very happy to initiate a disciple of genius.

When he settled in Paris, President Pascal had soon found his level, and it was a high one, in a circle of men of science and gifted amateurs : this enlightened coterie, to which he found himself admitted upon equal terms, was, in fact, the nucleus from which thirty years later Colbert will develop the Académie des Sciences. The centre of this little group of adventurous spirits was Father Marin Mersenne, a Minimist monk whose cowl and gown authorized conceptions which in those days might have been dangerous to a layman. The mind of Father Mersenne, in its brilliant confusion, was constantly throwing out sparks, like a smoky fire of green wood. He had no equal for suddenly striking out a surprising view or an unexpected question, but

he seldom followed up these extraordinary conceptions, leaving them to fructify in other minds. When all the archives of seventeenth-century science have been explored, we shall, I expect, find in Father Mersenne the origin of many a discovery.

But Etienne Pascal's special friend (to whom his young son, Blaise, speedily attached himself) was the mathematician Roberval, supposed to be the most disagreeable man in France—a proud, excitable, disputatious creature, full of prejudices and quarrels, which Etienne Pascal and his marvellous boy were perhaps too ready to espouse. They, coming from their province, were dazzled by the warm friendship and the talent of Roberval (it was he, I believe, who introduced into geometry the notion of speed), and did not perceive the frequent injustice of his onslaughts on Descartes, for instance, and on Torricelli : great men, established, the one in Holland, the other in Florence, who were frequent correspondents of Father Mersenne's. That Minimist monk was also in touch with Galileo, an old man in Pascal's boyhood, whose wonderful mind left its imprint and its image on the spirit of the unknown boy from Auvergne, who would listen, spellbound, to the reading aloud of the Italian's letters.

There were many other eminent men in the Paris Academy, but I will not confuse my reader with too many names ; let him remember, in view of future events, the characters of Mersenne and of Roberval, and the hostility of the latter to Descartes. An unjustified hostility which unduly influenced Pascal in his adolescence. And to make my point

still clearer I will quote a passage from the correspondence of Leibnitz :

" Monsieur Descartes saw much deeper into things and was far more capable of making a discovery. But, like all meditative characters, Descartes was too much absorbed in the contemplation of a vast horizon to take note of the petty details at his feet, whereas Roberval was a Professor with every scrap of his knowledge ready at the tips of his fingers, so that, in their disputes, he often seemed to carry off the prize." (*Lettres de Leibnitz*, edition Foucher de Careil, quoted by Lord St. Cyres.)

All these new friends of President Pascal's were experimental philosophers and disciples of Francis Bacon. They dreamed all our dreams. Father Mersenne imagined a diving-ship or submarine—a monster of copper and leather with portholes and tubes communicating with the surface.[1] The same Mersenne devised a *machine à voler*,[2] and would probably have been surprised to learn that nearly three hundred years must pass before his idea could be put in practice. In the monk's quiet cell, at the Monastery of the Order of the Hermits of Saint-Francis, where every week or so these men of science would congregate, the most suggestive and stimulating topics were broached. What is the cause of specific gravity ? When an object falls to the ground, is it because of a quality inherent in itself, or is it drawn by an attraction from without ? On this subject, Roberval and President Pascal held a great argument with the mathematician Fermat. The question was still pending. In an English orchard, a certain apple had not yet dropped. The

[1] Charles de la Rivière : *Histoire de la Marine Française.*
[1] *Revue du Mois*, Février 1911.

world had still six years to wait for Isaac Newton's birth.

Those were the days of grand revelations. For students of Physical Science the Veil was rent in twain, and beyond the neat sphere of their imagining they began to perceive a multitudinous universe. The Earth was not, perhaps, the stable centre of all being, but, one among others, a mere planet whirling round the sun. Such a view still appeared novel and dangerous ; a man might be a master of physical science and not fall in with it ; the Pascals themselves were never entirely convinced, and if father and son were united in an indignation which prudence bade them dissimulate, when the Inquisition condemned Galileo for having affirmed the rotation of the earth, it was because they held that the province of Rome was to judge of faith, not of facts, which latter were the peculiar domain of science. Galileo's theory held, in the seventeen-thirties, much the same position as Einstein's theory to-day. It was a renewal of science whose train of consequences made men pause, and Blaise Pascal was to write one day in the *Pensées* that it is quite unnecessary to decide whether the sun moves round the earth or the earth round the sun. Many a seventeenth-century geometer still found it hard to give up the conception of a universe complete and closed, immense, yet limited, the moated garden of God. The notion of the Infinite seemed wilder, more desolate, than an abyss to men who had thought the Earth alone alive and peopled, like a house in a park, among the decorative stars, planted for

ornament, inanimate and numbered. The Earth, on the other hand, was crammed, they held, and crowded with life, not an inch of it empty or dead : an uninterrupted cycle of elements filled with the Breath Divine. So much as a pin's point of a vacuum would produce in Nature an immense, a universal convulsion and catastrophe ! Such was the official, the orthodox, point of view. Men like Mersenne, like Descartes, may have had their doubts—they thought it wiser to keep them to themselves. When in 1633 the Holy Inquisition condemned Galileo to imprisonment, Descartes, who had been on the point of publishing a theory of the universe which included the rotation of the earth, took fright, withdrew his volume, and four years later brought out instead the far less perilous *Discours de la Méthode.*

Those years of Pascal's boyhood were, in fact, even more than our own an age of transition. As in a dissolving view, one picture was fading, while its successor had not quite emerged. Then, as now, the fundamental ideas of knowledge—the notions of time, space, movement, matter—were being reviewed, revised and revalued, and the new hypothesis was abundant in discoveries and inventions.

A child among the doctors, Blaise Pascal (the constant companion of a widowed father) passed seven happy years in this enlightened circle. He never went to school or college. In this close intimacy with one other mind, akin to his own, the boy missed the variety, the suppleness, the give-and-take, the modest sense of one's own obvious limitations which come of an education in common ; he was

inclined to be positive and arrogant ; but at least he learned nothing that he did not thoroughly comprehend ; he accepted few statements on hearsay, relied on proof and experiment, and acquired from his beloved teacher a quick distrust of metaphysical reverie.

Only once did the father and son leave Paris to revisit their native mountains. It was in 1636. President Pascal, Gilberte and Blaise then undertook the long journey to Clermont in Auvergne, leaving Jacqueline in charge of some friends in Paris. They returned in the late autumn of the same year, thinking to resume their old pleasant way of life, but grave financial anxieties awaited the harassed father of a young family.

The Municipal Loan ceased to pay its full dividends. This put President Pascal, and a great many other Parisians, to the gravest inconvenience. He had invested his fortune in this loan and relied on his income to pay his expenses. His mind, accustomed to finance, soon grasped the fact that the Treasury of France was empty and that the Government was using the City Loan as a reserve fund to pay its way. Etienne Pascal was doubly indignant, both as an investor and as a financier. With two or three other persons as angry and as competent as himself he headed an insurrectionary meeting which offered some show of violence to Chancellor Séguier. Two of these leaders were arrested by the police and immediately imprisoned in the Bastille. Etienne Pascal was fortunate enough to escape ; all summer long he remained in hiding among his friends.

CHAPTER II

"LA PETITE PASCAL"

THE children were left at home under the charge of Louise Delfaut, the nurse who had brought them up from infancy: three young creatures rich in gifts and individuality—Gilberte was turned seventeen, a girl of great good sense and deep capacity for affection, the handsomest of the bunch; Blaise was in his fifteenth year, gracious and engaging. Can we imagine a Shelley with those same wide and dreaming eyes, those high arched brows, that small chin, but with a long, strong and prominent nose between high cheek-bones, proclaiming him French from the south of the Loire? Jacqueline seemed the darling of them all, so witty she was, so lively and so lovely—she was twelve years old, the very apple of her father's eye and, in this year 1638, she appeared perhaps the most remarkable of an extraordinary family. She had already a certain reputation as a poetess, and the Queen had lately sent for the child to Court, professing her Royal self dazzled by the aptness and grace of the little maid's conversation; a slim booklet of her poems had seen the light and was vastly admired, but if we read to-day the verse of Jacqueline Pascal we find it without charm or fragrance, brown and brittle as dried flowers from which the glory has departed.

In September the little girl fell sick of the small-pox. The fugitive father suffered torments more cruel than any that Cardinal Richelieu could inflict. Let me quote from a Memoir which, in later life, Gilberte was to write about her younger sister :

"My father, at this hearing, forgot all his fears, and said that, whatever were the risks, he could not keep away from home when Jacqueline was ill ; he must watch the whole course of the complaint ; and, in fact, he never left the child by day or night. At last she recovered. But, in the course of the fever, she had lost all her beauty. She was thirteen years old and of an age to love her own good looks and grieve for the loss of them. Yet she barely seemed to notice the change in her disfigured face, thanking God that He had left her alive. She composed a copy of verses in which she called the pits and seams left by the pox 'the guardians of her maiden innocence.' She did not quickly regain her strength ; all through the winter weather she was obliged to keep the house, and yet she never seemed to find the time too long, being greatly occupied with her dolls and her other baubles."

So soon as Jacqueline was out of danger the President again went into hiding, and this time farther afield, for it had begun to be pretty well spread about where he was, and Cardinal Richelieu, for all his greatness, had the temper of a tyrant towards his enemies, ever ready to clap them into prison or even to cry : "Off with his head !"

So the President took refuge with his brother in Auvergne, and the months of his absence dragged on into a year.

Meanwhile the pathetic situation of the three deserted children, so handsome and so gifted, keeping house together in Paris, had struck the fancy of the fashionable world. And so it happened

that in the spring of 1639, just a year after the President's frustrated arrest, Jacqueline was asked to take a part in a comedy, acted by children, which was to be performed before Cardinal Richelieu. "We must have 'la petite Pascal'!" cried the Cardinal's niece, Madame d'Aiguillon, and sent one of her gentlemen-in-waiting (for she was a Duchess and a great person in her day) to ask Mademoiselle Pascal's permission for her little sister to play in Scudéry's *L'Amour Tyrannique*.

Poor Gilberte showed this emissary no smiling face. For the last twelve months she had borne a heavy burden and saw no likelihood as yet of the President's return. Moreover, Jacqueline was still excitable and fragile. So she turned her dourest brows on the bowing gentleman and replied that her situation was such that she could not take much heed of other people's pleasures. Madame d'Aiguillon, however, was not the woman to accept "No" for an answer. She wrote at once to the moping elder sister (and now I am quoting another Memoir, that of Gilberte's daughter-that-was-to-be), saying that this was not the way to go to work if she wished to see her father safe at home again. Let Jacqueline act her best and then, when the Cardinal had clapped and cheered and smiled, let her go up to him and ask for her father to be forgiven. There was sense in this; Gilberte at once relented, and the great actor Mondory (who hailed from Clermont and who knew the Pascals) began to teach little Jacqueline her words.

So in the month of April, at the Hôtel de Riche-

lieu, the comedy was played with brilliant success. Jacqueline looked so small and childish, being little for her age—more like a child of eight than a girl of thirteen—that she aroused the Cardinal's enthusiasm when "she rushed on to the stage and stood there, quite still, aghast and frightened, as though dumbfounded by bad news; or when, at another point, she would weep her heart out, lamenting her misfortune. She was the best actress in the piece" (*Marguerite Périer*). Richelieu looked so little formidable that the last word was scarcely spoken when Jacqueline ran up to the great man, fearful lest he should make his escape before she had said her say; and, in fact, he had already risen to take his leave. Smiling, he sat down again and took the little girl upon his knees. Then, overwrought by emotion, she began to cry.

"What is the matter?" asked his Eminence, as gently as though he had not been a tyrant—and Jacqueline, remembering her verses, gulped down her tears and burst forth, in impeccable Alexandrines:

> "Ne vous étonnez pas, incomparable Armand, . . .
> Rappelez de l'exil mon misérable père!"

"Tell him he can return whenever he likes," said the Cardinal quite quietly, "and tell him that I expect him to visit me, accompanied by his little family."

"There is also a son (burst in Madame d'Aiguillon) who has a perfect genius for mathematics; though but in his fifteenth year, he has mastered the subtlest secrets of arithmetic."

And here the great lady sent Gilberte to fetch her brother, who stood silent among the spectators. We still possess Jacqueline's letter to her father, which describes the scene :

" My sister brought my brother up to the Duchess and she paid him many a fine compliment on his skill in science. And then they took us into another room, where was laid out a magnificent collation of preserved fruits, with fresh fruit as well, and lemonade, and things of that sort, the Duchess fondling and caressing me in a way that you would not think possible. In fact, I dare not tell you how they flattered me—to the top of my bent. . . .

" I am very much obliged to Monsieur de Mondory for his lessons. He has been most attentive. Do write him a few lines by the first post ! He thoroughly deserves it. As for myself, I esteem myself most happy to have been of use in a matter which can but give you pleasure, for that, Sir and Father, has ever been the desire—ay, to the extreme of passion !—of your very humble and obedient daughter and servant,

" PASCAL.

" PARIS, *April* 4, 1639."

After this pretty scene, which we owe to contemporary documents, shall I confess my wicked imagination ? If Richelieu relented so graciously, it was not entirely to please and reward " la petite Pascal " ; the " incomparable Armand " was not a man of feeling. But he had a new scheme in his head which required the collaboration of an *élite* of financiers, well acquainted with the law, and unmistakably honest : men on whose integrity and obstinate virtue he could rely. Etienne Pascal was such a one, a man whose rare merit was being wasted in too prolonged a game of hide-and-seek. Although Jacqueline Pascal never suspected it, that pretty parade of the play, the weeping child and the

magnanimous Minister, had probably been arranged in all its details between the Cardinal, his niece, and the comedian, Mondory, who, that very afternoon, had been closeted with the great man for close upon two hours. Richelieu wanted just such a person as Etienne Pascal; and so he was willing to spout his Alexandrines with the rest, and quote: "Soyons amis, Cinna!" to a man who had long been President of a provincial Court of Assessment.

The French nation has a constitutional objection to paying taxes which, at certain moments, becomes particularly acute. In 1639 the Treasury was as empty as a drum. Despite the most stringent orders of the Minister, the provincial Parliaments squeezed nothing out of the ratepayers, connived at fraud, encouraged evasion, and sympathized with the people rather than with the Government. So the Cardinal determined to set over these recalcitrant local bodies a staff of High Commissioners, Prefects, Inspectors of Finance. They were something of all this; he styled them Intendants. Their attributions were important and extended: they were magistrates as well as imposers of taxes. Heads of Police, they were Lords of a Court of Appeal with power to revise or try anew cases of civil or criminal law. It was their duty to see that the army was supplied with food and munitions. They were High Lords of the Crown Lands, Forests and Rivers. But especially they were supreme in the repartition and collection of taxes. Their authority lasted but a few years in Richelieu's time; a hundred years later we shall see them reappear, shorn of much of their

omnipotence, as the hated body of the Fermiers-Généraux.

Richelieu wanted Etienne Pascal for one of his Intendants, and, of course, he got him. In the autumn of 1639 the fugitive President was named Intendant of the richest and most unruly of all the provinces, Normandy. So soon as the necessary arrangements were completed, the Pascals left Paris for Rouen, where the President reigned in a sort of vice-regal importance. His fifteen-year-old son was to some extent associated in his labours : Blaise had not been long at work before he conceived the idea of a mechanical computer, or arithmetical machine, which would lighten the business of such formidable accounts—a labour which sometimes kept his father busy until close on two o'clock in the small hours.

CHAPTER III

ROUEN

THOSE years in Rouen were all-important for Blaise Pascal's development. They removed him from the atmosphere of Paris, lax and "libertine," as the phrase then went—free-thinking, as we should say—and permeated by the philosophy of Montaigne; and they set him, at the most impressionable age, in the serious centre of Neo-Stoicism, that Rouen then was. The Norman capital was the land of Guillaume du Vair (translator of Epictetus, and author of a work on the moral philosophy of the Stoics) and of Corneille. The change was as great as it might have been a century later if a sensitive youth had left London for Edinburgh.

In future years, Pascal will often sit and ponder what his mind would have been like had it been subjected to a different environment. O doubt of doubts: our inmost Self is but the sport of Chance and Circumstance!

"How many different natures does a man's soul contain? How many possible vocations? By how mere an accident each of us turns to that which he has heard belauded and admired by those about him, and supposes that alone important! The cobbler's son makes his criterion of a well-turned heel" (fragment 116, *Pensées*, ed. Brunschvicg).

The son of Etienne Pascal thought nothing so well worthy of a man's attention as mathematics, and produced, at sixteen, a new theory of Conic Sections, which he expounded in a slender pamphlet; a copy of this Essay still exists in the Bibliothèque Nationale, printed in 1640. Mersenne, writing to Descartes, had already announced the boy's discovery, praising a precocity so rare; but Descartes was prejudiced against the Pascals—friends of Roberval's. He looked upon the father as a pushing amateur and had scant faith in the son. What could a child of sixteen know about Conic Sections? So when at last the great man consented to cast his eye on the boy's pages, he answered his correspondent in April 1641:

"It is just as I thought! I had not read half the little essay on Conics by M. Pascal's son before I saw that he had taken most of his ideas from M. des Argues." Nor would Descartes ever admit the originality of Pascal's first effort. If it was not des Argues, why then it must have been President Pascal who supplied the matter for the lad to put into words of his own! And this ill-humour of Descartes produced quite a sensation in the Pascals' old Parisian circle, the quarrelsome Roberval, among others, protesting loudly. It was perhaps this disparaging attitude of Descartes which turned the young man's attention from theory to practice and made an inventor out of a geometer. But I think it was rather the wish to help his father with his intricate accounts. All through his life, Pascal will love to let Science wait on Circumstance; his ideas

and inventions spring from some living want ; he would have agreed with Goethe that the finest poems are all occasional poems.

So he turned his attention from Conic Sections to the invention of a mechanical computer, a reckoning instrument (shall I own that I always think of Pascal when I note those figures on the little dial of a taxi-cab, or watch the mysterious receptacle that counts out the change in a shop?). The completion of his arithmetical machine occupied ten years of his youth, for Pascal made more than fifty models before he was entirely satisfied, employing several artisans to carry out his designs. Earning a large income, proud of his only son, Etienne Pascal furnished without stint all that was necessary : metals, forge and workmen. I have seen one of these early products of Pascal's genius, the ancestor of the mathematical machines used in our modern laboratories as well as of a host of mechanical reckoners : it is a bright oblong box of brass whose starry wheels may have been filed and polished, hewn out of the solid metal, by Pascal's own hands, for he did not disdain the humblest details of craftsmanship in the service of his ideal.

Being thus absorbed in his invention, he had not much time to give to his father's business. It was a very terrible business, requiring, besides the exercise of many virtues, a singular hardness of heart. In those days the rich went almost untaxed ; they had that privilege in return for their readiness to fight their country's battles. Vile lucre must be wrung from the poor. Hence many iniquities and many

injustices ; the Publican, the Intendant, the Fermier-Général has seldom been a beloved character. In Etienne Pascal's time there were armed revolts harshly repressed. Yet nowhere in the writings of his son do we find a word of protest, a sigh of pity, a bright tear fallen upon the *Pensées* because of the tax-gatherer's severity. So much are we coloured, chameleon-like, by the medium in which we move ; so natural do we find all the actions of those whom we respect. And still the cobbler's son takes for his criterion a *talon bien tourné.*

This Rouen of 1640 was a rich and fashionable centre, for Paris had not yet absorbed all the forces of France : a high level of culture reigned in many an old cathedral city, for in these country towns there were *salons* and academies, amusements, intellectual pleasures, just as in the capital. Great men inhabited them. Fermat lived contented at Toulouse, young Corneille still had his house in Rouen, nor found it out of the way for a dramatic poet, since Mondory and his company had their regular season at Rouen every year when the King and the Cardinal would visit the town after drinking the waters at Forges-les-Eaux. In 1643 we find Guez de Balzac writing to Corneille as follows :

"I cannot rival in elegance with a man like you who lives in Rouen when he is not in Paris—that is to say, he exchanges one Court for another Court and never leaves the sphere of the *grand monde.*"

The Intendant's house soon became the meeting-place of the choicer spirits of the Norman capital.

Every winter there was held in Rouen a sort of

"Floral Games" (as they said in Toulouse), where poets competed for a prize. And in 1639 the prize was carried off by the Intendant's daughter, Jacqueline Pascal. But let her elder sister tell the tale:

"We had not been long in Rouen before Monsieur Corneille came to see us, and he persuaded Jacqueline to send in a copy of verses. The theme given was the Immaculate Conception. She bore away the palm, and when, with drum and fife, the people brought her recompense to our door in pomp and ceremony, she received them with the sweetest indifference. Though she was then fifteen years old she was still as gamesome as a child, and loved nothing so much as to play with her dolls. We used to rebuke her for this, but all in vain—she liked her dolls better than the finest company in the town."

When it came to improvising a sonnet of gratitude, Jacqueline declared herself incapable, and Corneille kindly consented to return thanks in her name. MM. Brunschvicg and Boutroux have reprinted in their splendid edition of Pascal's works, the poet's quaint impromptu:

"Pour une jeune Muse absentes
une fille de douze années,
Qui, seule de son sexe, eut de prix sur ce Puy."

Jacqueline thanked the great poet in his turn, but without attaching much attention to his compliments.

"She did not care for praise," wrote Gilberte. "Never did I see anyone less attracted by celebrity or reputation. Nor was she touched by the advances of those who sought her society. Though everyone looked up when she entered a room, though a little murmur would run round, followed by a hush (they waiting for her to say something delightful), yet Jacqueline never seemed to notice anything particular and received all this homage with an indifference made amiable by the sweetness of her temper, her kind heart and her charm of manner."

While Gilberte was occupied with the house, Jacqueline with her dolls and her sonnets and Blaise with his calculating machine, their father was cruelly overworked, so that he sent into Auvergne for a young kinsman of his, Florin Périer, who had not been many months in Rouen before he fell in love with his kind, capable and handsome cousin, Gilberte Pascal. They were married in 1641. Pascal was always on very good terms with his brother-in-law, and this, I think, is the only marriage among his nearest and dearest which Pascal seems to have accepted without protest. For two years the young Périers continued to live in the Intendant's house. Their first child, Etienne, was born there ; and was chiefly reared there, and always was to be unto Blaise Pascal as a son, rather than a nephew.

Most of Pascal's days at this time were spent in his workshop experimenting on different models of his computer, some of them in wood, some in brass. He had a great difficulty in finding workmen—there was only one in Rouen, a clockmaker, who was really competent, and he only when Pascal was present. Although I have held the machine in my hands, I am too ignorant to explain its mechanism : one wheel seems to push another wheel ; the single number sets in movement the tens ; the tens unlock the hundreds ; the hundreds the thousands.

"I know not if there be another principle in Nature (writes the inventor in his prospectus), and it is just as easy to set ten thousand wheels in motion as a single one."

When the computer was complete, launched on the world (with a flourishing dedication to Chancellor

Séguier) by a young inventor aged twenty-two, Pascal looked on the conception of his brain, on the work of his hands, with a satisfaction not unmixed with horror. He had gone very near in his workshop to creating life ! He was to write one day in his *Pensées* :

" The calculating machine produces effects nearer to human thought than anything that we observe in the actions of animals. Will alone is wanting. The brute creation knows how to will."

Pascal had expected to win fame and fortune at a single bound by the publication of his invention, but the great expense of producing it, and the time required, limited the profits. The *savants* of Paris were loud in their praises, and acclaimed a prodigy. Others, too, foresaw a fortune for the machine, and a clockmaker of Rouen attempted an imitation of it :

" The sight of this little abortion (writes Pascal) put such a damper on the ardour with which I had laboured at my model, that, on the instant, I paid off all my workmen and determined to have nothing more to do with an enterprise which a dishonest plagiary might render ridiculous or profitless."

Fortunately the Lord Chancellor granted Pascal a patent which secured him against any possibility of piracy, and left him free to pursue that clockmaker of Rouen with an implacable thoroughness worthy of an avenging angel.

But too much labour, excitement, emotion, had overwrought the young man's nerves. I fancy, too, that he was greatly depressed by the absence of Gilberte, his friend and confidante, who had followed her husband to Clermont, leaving her baby as a pledge of her return. Jacqueline was wholly engrossed by literature (and her brother rather

despised her for it). Etienne Pascal was so busy in his office that he sometimes sat up writing and reckoning half the night. Blaise Pascal was thrown back upon himself. He saw before him worlds to conquer. And he was so weary that he could barely raise himself from his bed. The disproportion between the outlook of his genius and his physical capacity filled him with a miserable sense of foredoomed defeat. His keen young mind held latent so many views, so many gifts, so many powers, which it could not as yet co-ordinate, and feared that it might realize none of them, for lack of health and opportunity.

That anxious curiosity as to the nature of things (which in later days Pascal held to be the "principal malady of mankind," and the most useless) tormented a young man on the verge of neurasthenia, who saw his fairest years slipping through his fingers like water, leaving no result, hurrying him, resistless, into the Unknown.

Just as Pascal had veered from pure mathematics to mechanical invention, so now he forsook his arithmetical machine to explore the constitution of the universe ; but his researches in physics could not go very far, for he needed appliances not to be found in Rouen. His health, too, was a hindrance ; he seemed to have fallen into a sort of decline without a cough. The Intendant, who spared no expense where his only son was concerned, authorized him to renew

the lease of their old house in the rue Brisemiche. In Paris, Blaise would find both doctors and laboratories, and Jacqueline could accompany her brother and care for his comfort.

The lease was signed in December 1645, and the young people were busy preparing their departure when an accident occurred which changed all their plans—Etienne Pascal had heard of a duel that was to take place in Rouen. A recent edict of the Cardinal's punished this offence with death, and the Intendant determined to prevent so great a misfortune. It was winter ; a sudden wave of cold had covered the streets of Rouen with a sheet of ice ; the horses, not yet roughshod, danced and stumbled in the glazed frost ; so the worthy man left his carriage and continued his way on foot, but he, too, slipped, and so untowardly as to dislocate his thigh-bone.

There seems to have been no great surgeon at that time in the city ; two gentlemen-quacks were the pride of Rouen, and enjoyed there, I suppose, much the same sort of a reputation as M. Coué recently had in Nancy. They were country squires of good birth and some fortune, two brothers of the name of Deschamps, but called after their estates, as was the custom of those days : M. des Landes and M. de la Bouteillerie. They were gifted with a natural turn for bone-setting; though they had no medical degree, they had walked the hospitals in Paris in order to be of service to their poorer neighbours ; on their return they had built a little hospital at the end of their park, which was more modern than any

that the town afforded. It was these two gentlemen who were summoned to the Intendant's bedside, a few days after the New Year in 1646.

They were Jansenists, having been converted to the views of Port-Royal by the famous Curé of Rouville, their parish priest, and along with their bandages and their splinters they took with them to the Intendance a new book, which was making some stir in the world, Antoine Arnauld's *Fréquente Communion*. The Arnaulds were of good Auvergnat stock ; Etienne Pascal had known Antoine Arnauld's father. From talking about the author, the two honest quacks fell to expounding his doctrine, as they massaged and bound and bathed their helpless patient.

Etienne Pascal, up to that time, had been a man of moral virtue, but not a Christian example—we have his granddaughter's word for it. He listened because he had nothing else to do, and so busy a man is incapable of inactivity. But Blaise Pascal listened and questioned with a very different degree of intensity. Here, perhaps, was the Something Wanting for lack of which he had been unable to find a permanent satisfaction in any of his pursuits. The two brothers spoke of the true doctrine of the Church recently re-discovered (as they thought) by a little group of modern disciples of Saint-Augustine. They told of Grace, that sudden and mysterious illumination—or rather, that irruption of the Will of God into the human soul, making a mortal participate in the Life eternal and divine ; and they declared that such grace was a free gift, depending

on nothing in man, descending alike upon the just and upon the unjust, according to a law beyond our human comprehension. They spoke of the corruption of the human heart, and their voices sank as they told of the many called, the few chosen. They said that we are, all of us, the thieves of Heaven, since all we are, or may be, we owe to Christ, and they affirmed that every effort made in view of fame or fortune, of love or knowledge, of power or pleasure, is treasure stolen from the sum we owe to our Redeemer, who, one day, will exact the debt, to the uttermost farthing.

Such was the doctrine expounded by M. des Landes and M. de la Bouteillerie in January 1646, at the Intendant's bedside. Etienne Pascal was deeply interested ; Blaise Pascal, after hungrily reading the works of the Jansenists and the arguments of their adversaries, declared himself converted. Hitherto, his interest had been in the physical universe, in number, in motion, in the combination of elements. Although a virtuous youth, singularly little inclined to doubt, or vice, or even pleasure, he had not been religious, "ayant toujours borné sa curiosité aux choses naturelles," as his sister Gilberte has written. But here he found a doctrine substantial and harsh, which suited the avidity of his young mind. Something that was not merely theory (like the idealism of Descartes), but which depended on an individual experience ; a discipline difficult and repellent, but which in the end gives its adept the freedom of an interior universe.

The period during which Pascal had grown out

of childhood was not a fanatical age. The wars of religion, which had died out less than forty years before, had left behind them a mood of cool distrust, of sceptical content, a dread of any subject that might rekindle old fires. The epicurean philosophy of Montaigne, the stoicism of du Vair, and, lately, this new idealism of Descartes, had framed a generation disposed to consider common sense and kindness the sole essential elements of Christianity. Perhaps young Pascal had never seen an apostle—a soul aflame with faith and charity—until those two gentlemen-bonesetters spent three months attending on his father. He was like a man who has beheld a vision. He read not only Arnauld, but Jansen's *Augustinus* (whose doctrine of the Will he soon assimilated), but chiefly his heart was touched when the two pious brothers spoke of the Abbé de Saint-Cyran. How marvellous were these different orders of the universe: some of them visible, but vain, subject to Time and Space (and these alone so far had absorbed Pascal's attention), while others, newly revealed, still out of his reach, arose, intangible but real, unseen but eternal, into the Infinite, like the steps of a stair!—" Incomprehensible?—But, because you cannot understand a thing, it does not cease to exist!" he was to write one day in the *Pensées*. This new religion, where the ray of Grace at any moment may upset the strict order of fore-ordained Necessity; this faith in a miracle perpetually possible, touched the most secret fibres of Blaise Pascal's nature; his heart was not yet changed—he was still a quick-tempered, high-

handed, arrogant young man—but his mind (which, I think, was, so far, more sensitive, more exquisitely organized than his heart) was convinced ; and he accepted a new ideal of life.

His first convert was his sister Jacqueline, a girl of twenty. A lively creature, deep in her poems and her correspondence with the *précieuses* of Paris, she was no match for Pascal with his hard, exact, practical mind, his intense capacity for thought and suffering. Her gift of verse, her gowns, her trinkets, her engagement to a young Counsellor of the Rouen Parliament, all had to go. Jacqueline gave up everything—caught her brother's ardour, as the burning-glass the sun's, and became—far more than he !—effectively converted. When the Périers arrived from Clermont in 1646 they found all their family transformed into the soberest of Puritans. Pascal, ardent, imperious and gay, made short work of bringing them, too, into the fold. Handsome young Madame Périer was soon engaged in stripping from her gowns the silver braid, the lace, the ribbons, which had seemed the natural sign of her social station, and then she set her steadfast mind to reform, not merely the outward, but the inner self.

After such an expense of spirit, one is surprised to find Pascal, a few months later, quite given up to physical science and apparently concerned with nothing else.

Youth is often a time of confused ambitions and

conflicting enthusiasms ; an apparent instability in early life may be the sign of a rich nature. As time goes on, our different aptitudes feed on one another like those eels enclosed in the water-tanks of Siena, until at last the strongest alone survive. Pascal, with his extraordinary mind, was insatiable in the pursuit of knowledge, while his impassioned and nervous temperament allowed him to occupy himself with only one thing at a time, and not for long.

Gilberte Périer was a truthful woman ; her principles confirmed a natural bent, and her *Memoirs* bear the stamp of an absolute sincerity. Yet more than once her testimony must be set aside. She wrote long after the events which she describes, and sometimes from hearsay, for she was not always her brother's housemate. With every respect for her word, and with all due belief in her honesty, we cannot follow her when she says that Pascal after his first conversion lost all interest in Science. Never had he been so engrossed by the study of Physics as in the autumn of 1646. He had received a visit that set him thinking about the weight of the air.

A chance visit, a letter, such were the usual channels by which, in those days, the new drift and circumstance of knowledge travelled from one country to another ; there was as yet no *Académie des Sciences* in Paris ; there were no congresses, no scientific journals. Each savant lived alone in his separate sphere : Descartes in Holland, Fermat at Toulouse, Torricelli in Florence, Pascal in Rouen, Father Mersenne and his group in Paris. Chance was their Mercury, and we cannot wonder if Pascal one

day should give this lack of intercommunication as the reason for his forsaking Science: "Le peu de communication qu'on en peut avoir"; and again in another place: "Le peu de communication de personnes savantes et de personnes désintéressées."

A letter handed round, a report, often erroneous, of a conversation, sometimes a sort of challenge flung out by the inventor: "I have discovered such and such a thing, and I defy you all to say how I did it!" such were the tardy and imperfect announcements of discoveries. Yet news leaked through. Italy was still the fount of knowledge, the land of the Renaissance; a traveller coming back from Italy would often bring some rare piece of news in his baggage. In 1644, Torricelli, in Florence, had made certain experiments, by filling with quicksilver a tube of glass closed at one end—which seemed to prove the possibility of an empty space in Nature. An empty space in Nature? The very phrase was an insult to the Schools, who went on repeating, after Aristotle, that Nature abhors a vacuum. The creation of such a void, could it come to pass, might shatter (it was said) into instant ruin the scheme of things in one immense explosion. We, who employ a vacuum to clean our carpets, can scarcely apprehend the danger then imagined.

None the less Torricelli, in his laboratory, turning upside down his tube of mercury, and plunging the free end into a basin filled with the same fluid, noticed that all the quicksilver did not run out of his tube; some of it remained there suspended, and above it reigned an empty space, filled (if I may say

so) with Vacancy made visible. Thus was it proved that, in spite of Aristotle, Nature could tolerate a vacuum. And Torricelli seems to have suspected that the force which kept the mercury hanging in the tube was not an interior force, inherent in itself, but the result of the weight of the circumambient air, pressing on the liquid; for one day he wrote: "We live submerged in an ocean of air and our experiments show that air has weight."

Probably at the back of Torricelli there was Galileo, who had died two years before, leaving all his papers to his young successor. No one seems to have been quite clear upon this point. Anyhow, in 1645 Torricelli begged a M. Pierre Petit, a military engineer of scientific tastes, at that time travelling in Italy, to inform his friends and correspondents in France of this important hypothesis, and Petit lost no time on his return in visiting Father Mersenne; they even tried to repeat the experiment on their own account, but failed, because of the poor quality of the glass tubes at their disposal. Then Mersenne wrote to Descartes, and he, too, made an attempt which came to grief for the same reason: the tubes were too brittle.

We of a later day can form no idea of the difficulty that attended the making of such an experiment. The expense was enormous. There was no pneumatic machine, no air-pump. The tubes, which constantly broke (so difficult were they to manipulate), required to be from six to fifty feet in height. They were not to be found in Paris.

But there was an excellent glass manufactory in Rouen—one of the first in France. In October 1646, M. Pierre Petit, finding himself in Rouen on business and having " une passion particulière pour les choses dont la cognoissance dépend des expériences," called on the Intendant, Etienne Pascal, to ask him whether the factory could not blow him some of these tubes. And they spoke of " the Italian experiment," as it was called, for no one seems to have been quite clear who was the original inventor, though Petit had heard of it in Florence from Torricelli himself ; Blaise Pascal was present at this interview. The natural reaction of Pascal's mind was, first to contradict, and then to examine. When Petit spoke of the void at the top of the tube :

" Not likely ! " cried the young man. " Nature abhors a vacuum ! Are you quite sure some air was not left in the tube ? Could it not permeate the glass ? " But he listened eagerly as the military engineer described the phenomenon which he had heard of in Italy, proving that Life did not reach without a break from pole to pole.

Eleven years later Blaise Pascal was to write to his brother-in-law :

" It is always a fault to flout an ancient maxim unless you have absolute proof that it is false, but in that case I hold it for the sign of a feeble nature to let any scruples interfere with its demolition, for we ought to have more veneration for evident truths than for received opinions " (Lettre à M. Périer, November 15, 1657).

Yet it was not very safe to disagree with received

opinions. Etienne Pascal, for example, could remember the burning alive of Giordano Bruno in 1600 and of Vanini in 1619. Galileo had been imprisoned by the Inquisition so recently as 1634 for affirming that the earth went round the sun. Descartes quite lately had been afraid to publish his cosmogony. . . .

Well, to return to Pierre Petit and his talk of a possible void. Pascal, on reflection, felt quite inclined to discard the ancient axiom about Nature abhorring a vacuum. Was Nature a person to have likes and dislikes ? Why was the bare notion of a vacuum considered impious ? " Neither David nor Solomon hath said, ' There is no vacancy in Nature, and therefore there is a God.' " The two propositions are entirely independent. Soon Pascal was more eager than Petit or than the Intendant to attempt the new experiment.

The tubes were blown, great tubes fifty feet high, and one of them was stopped at the bottom end and filled with quicksilver, then the tube was reversed and plunged, mouth downwards, into a basin also filled with mercury. And at the top end of the tube, above the fallen liquid, Pascal looked on the narrow domain of Nothingness. There *was* a void ! The experiment had succeeded. Pascal caused a platform to be erected in front of the glass factory and repeated the test in public, explaining its importance in a brilliant lecture. He published afterwards an account of " the Italian experiment " :

" Je ne sens pas l'inventeur . . . l'expérience a été faite en Italie quatre ans avant les miennes, et même elle a été l'occasion qui me les a fait entreprendre."

But it was not till long after the publication of his treatise that Pascal learned the name of the first author : Torricelli.

Pascal was not the inventor, but he was the completer. He was the first to organize systematically his observations, to succeed in elaborating an experiment, to reduce a nebulous aura of vague hypothesis to an evident sequence of facts. Nearly every great discovery in science has at least two such begetters : the man who imagines and the man who realizes (and sometimes Pascal was both). The young inventor of twenty-three forgot his ill-health in the enjoyment of success. Two of the strongest elements of his nature, the fighting spirit and the love of intellectual sport, found their satisfaction in this experiment. And he shall one day write in his *Pensées* : " Man cannot live without a game of some sort, a risk, an adventure. The savant in his study burning the midnight oil, bent on proving his point and confuting an adversary, is serving the Truth no doubt, but is also enjoying the tussle. Not the prize, but the strife gives a zest to his researches " :

" Ainsi dans le jeu, ainsi dans la recherche de la vérité on aime à voir le combat des opinions—mais à contempler la vérité trouvée, point du tout ! " (fr. 135).

Suddenly, early in February 1647, Pascal appears to have lost all his interest in a question which had, for nearly five months, absorbed his energies. Those revolving lights of his singular nature had turned their wheel. Science was now in the shade, while

Pascal, with all the zeal of a Grand Inquisitor, was engaged on the fresh pursuit of hunting down a heretic.

There came at that time to Rouen a certain itinerant preacher, a Capuchin friar: the people called him Brother Saint-Ange. He professed a new philosophy, extremely intellectual, for he taught that Mind alone sufficed for man's salvation. He asked no change of heart, no deeds of charity. Let a man conceive the Truth and his soul was safe! Faith was a staff which might be left to the weaker brethren; a strong understanding could scale unaided the dizziest heights.

The people of Rouen (accustomed to the philosophy of the great Stoic, Guillaume du Vair) trooped into the churches to hear Brother Saint-Ange. There was even a question of inducting him into a country living in the neighbourhood.

"But the man's a heretic!" exclaimed Blaise Pascal. "The thing shall not be done!"

We are in 1647. Pascal is twenty-four, a Jansenist convert of less than a year's standing, with little experience and less theology; but he has not the least doubt of his capacity to act as Guardian Angel of the Church. He draws his flaming sword. The same implacable spirit that avenged its wrongs upon a Norman clockmaker, who had insulted a rare machine by an ignorant imitation, arose to confound a presumptuous Capuchin, who affirmed

that the Mind, and not the Will, the Heart, was the instrument of Salvation.

This Brother Saint-Ange was no doubt a vapouring fool, but here and there, in his flights of fancy, there gleamed an odd streak of Franciscan poetry, as well as of pre-Leibnitzian philosophy. Years and years afterwards, when Pascal sits recalling the past, he enshrines in his *Pensées* more than one of the opinions of the Friar. For nothing was ever lost upon Pascal, not even the things he destroyed.

Brother Saint-Ange took himself very seriously. And after his sermons it was his habit to visit the chief persons of the town, enlisting them in his cause. So one day—it was the first of February 1647—he called on the son of one of the principal magistrates, young M. Hallé de Mouflaines (he took the territorial title of du Mesnil), whom the monk found engaged in conversation with an intelligent-looking youth of twenty—Adrien Auzoult, by name. Both these young men were intimate with Blaise Pascal, who was at that time the prince, the leader, of intellectual youth in Rouen. They were talking with the Friar, fooling him to the top of his bent, when the door opened again, and a third young man appeared, tall, very fragile, leaning on a stick ; a young man with eyes set wide apart, full of a look of dreamy aloofness, and a long, strong, rather cruel nose with sensitive, distended nostrils. And now I feel sorry for Brother Saint-Ange, that eloquent, vapouring fool, for he has in front of him a singularly hard, obstinate and positive young genius.

The monk in his brown gown had been expound-

ing his system of physics to his two hearers : Auzoult, the future astronomer, and Hallé de Mouflaines, who were laughing as loud as politeness would permit, when Pascal joined the discussion. His first care was to learn with whom he was dealing, so he began at once, addressing the Capuchin :

" Are you, roughly speaking, a Jesuit or a Jansenist ? "

Brother Saint-Ange objected to a plain statement —he was not exactly for or against anything anywhere. " From the point of view of the Eternal," he averred, " there are no contraries ! There is always a great deal to be said on both sides. When the Mænads tore Orpheus into a thousand pieces, there seemed to be innumerable fragments—and yet it was all one Orpheus."

At this unexpected illustration, the three young men joined the Friar in a hearty laugh. They showed him to the door with much civility, assuring him that they would certainly return his call.

They did, but this second colloquy took the form of an inquisition which the hapless monk attempted in vain to elude. In the hope of placating Blaise Pascal, he complimented him on his masterly researches into the nature of a vacuum—researches vastly appreciated in Paris, and, skipping now this way now that, thought to gain the door. When he found that impossible, he sought to improve his position by saying that he had just been reading Saint-Augustine, and thought there was a great deal of good sense in it. Such feints were but child's play against three inquisitors of twenty whom neither

praise nor poetry nor eloquence appeased. Saint-Ange knew at last that he stood in the presence of his judges, who might, if they chose, formulate against him an accusation of heresy—no light affair! His tone changed, and he besought the young gentlemen to remember that whatever had passed his lips was to be taken, not as matter of doctrine, but merely as the thoughts and fancies which sprang up in a conversation between friends. They agreed with every show of courtesy, none the less determined to turn so doubtful a sheep out of the fold. The other two youths might have laughed and forgotten. Pascal laughed also, but his piercing eye blazed with a furious love of truth.

The three friends called on the Bishop and found that Prelate no less inclined than Brother Saint-Ange himself to think that a great deal might be said on both sides. He was a fine scholar, who had been known to preach in Greek, and he was pleased to support three such intellectual youths. Despite his hesitation he backed them with a sort of zeal, while the city of Rouen was for Brother Saint-Ange; and the tug-of-war was fierce as ever when Etienne Pascal, some months later—anxious above all things to protect the public peace and have no new wars of religion in his administration—interfered, in his capacity of Intendant, and patched up a sort of compromise. Brother Saint-Ange signed a retractation, witnessed by his three young persecutors, in return for which he was inducted into his living, but resigned it almost immediately and retired to a monastery. Everyone thus received some

sort of satisfaction. But Blaise Pascal considered that he had received a rebuff. He had at least learned one of the characteristics of his own genius : that ardent and dramatic taste for controversy which never will forsake him. And we have acquired an insight into his combative disposition, his aggressive sincerity. His friend Nicole was to write on another occasion, sixteen years later :

" His [Pascal's] harshness and tartness were certainly very violent and very ill-founded. Yet they sprang from a good heart and the sincerest passion for truth, joined to a certain inconsiderateness (*légèreté*) which caused him to make up his mind too quickly and without looking into details." [1]

It is a defect that will abide with him till the last.

[1] Lettre de Nicole à Taignier, 3 Juin, 1663, cited in Brunschvicg's edition of Pascal, vol. x, p. 178.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW ARCHIMEDES

IN the excitement of invention, discovery, pursuit, Pascal had postponed a long-impending illness. But Nature, when she concedes a like delay, exacts a cruel rate of usury. Suddenly his force betrayed him, he fell into an irresistible languor; that intestinal consumption which had menaced his infancy, although to all appearances cured, broke out anew, this time accompanied by strange nervous symptoms: a numbness of the lower limbs, sometimes amounting to paralysis, cruel headaches, a constriction of the gullet so severe that the patient could swallow only a little liquid, taken warm, and drop by drop. He seemed to be dangerously ill. But Pascal did not die, and, when his health mended a little, his father resumed that old plan of sending him to Paris under the charge of Jacqueline. So in the summer of 1647 the brother and sister left Rouen for the capital, where they might hope to find both physicians—and physicists.

Pascal's reputation had preceded him to Paris, where Father Mersenne had left off calling him the "marvellous boy" to dub him "the New Archimedes." But, when first he re-entered his old home in the rue Brisemiche, the young student of physics was too ill to continue his researches concerning a Void in Nature. As the summer wore on, his

interest was stimulated by the report of some experiments recently made in Warsaw by a Capuchin friar, Father Valeriano Magni, who claimed priority over both Torricelli and Pascal. The latter was still too ailing to champion his own cause, but his father's friend, Roberval—the kind, disagreeable man who loved a fight—took the pen from his tired hand and fought his battles for him.

All through that summer Pascal spent the weary days of a man accustomed to be ill, continually absorbed by medical rites and remedies, keeping his room for the most part, and, on those happier days when he could venture out, dragging his crutches to some neighbouring place, which was more often the church where M. Singlin preached than Father Mersenne's Academy. Monsieur Singlin was the confessor of the Convent of Port-Royal-de-Paris (the filial of the mother-house in the country). His sermons attracted a great concourse of people to the new church of the Jansenists; they were especially prized by men of science and writers of the more intellectual sort. Yet M. Singlin was not particularly eloquent—("True eloquence despises eloquence," as Pascal declared one day)—he was a quiet, modest little man of a retiring disposition. No genius, but filled with the love of God and brimming over with the wish to help his fellows. Something more persuasive than the finest oratory welled from his heart to his lips, so that his sermons were not only admired, they were efficacious. "Notre nouvelle église est toujours pleine. Il se convertit toujours quelqu'un," wrote the Abbess,

Mère Angélique Arnauld, to the Queen of Sweden. Among these converts moved Blaise Pascal, supported on his crutch, pale as a man is when fed on asses' milk, full of nervous qualms as to his bodily health, and still more terrible apprehensions as to the immortal destiny of a soul devoured by the thirst for knowledge.

That rhythm rebounding from the *libido sciendi* to the love of God which swayed the whole existence of Blaise Pascal had now become singularly abrupt, rapid and syncopated. As a rule, his mornings were given to prayer, to piety ; his afternoons to experiment, to a jealous ambition to be recognized as an innovator and to the composition of a *Short Account of the Recent Experiments on a Vacuum*, which was to give him, beyond all possible contestation, the place he merited in the history of Science. And in this full tide of meditation and research, a great event occurred : Pascal made the acquaintance of Descartes.

They were not prepared to like each other. Descartes, from his height of philosophy, was inclined to look on the two Pascals as vain and vacant amateurs. Experimentalists to the backbone, they, on the other hand, considered Descartes to be a mere metaphysician, basing a world of brain-woven phantasms on theory, not on fact. The rival seekers after Truth did not often cross each other's path, for Descartes lived in Holland, and I think that he and the younger Pascal had never met before that autumn of 1647. Family affairs, financial arrangements, had lately summoned

the great man to Brittany from his Dutch retreat; having set his fortunes in order, he now lingered a few days in Paris on his homeward track, meaning to pay no visits there, save to his old friend and constant correspondent, Father Mersenne. In the Minimist's study he met one day Blaise Pascal. Was this the glorious, triumphant youth? This frail and pale young man, lame, often voiceless, who yet contrived to be so brilliant and so incisive? Descartes (says his biographer Baillet) liked hearing of M. Pascal's new experiments in Rouen, although he was not persuaded of the possibility of a void in Nature. Was it on this occasion, was it later on—was it at no time save in the figment of a philosopher's memory—that Descartes advised Pascal to carry his tubes to the summit of some tower or hill in order to test the pressure of the atmosphere by the rise and fall of the quicksilver? In later days, Descartes constantly affirmed that he, and he alone, had proposed to Pascal that great experiment of the Puy-de-Dôme, which established the reality of atmospheric pressure and brought about the invention of the barometer. Pascal affirmed the contrary. Had Descartes made the suggestion, would Pascal have paid any attention to a philosopher's vagary?—a theme thrown out without proof or experiment. "Qu'est ce qu'une simple conjecture sans aucune preuve?" as he exclaimed upon another occasion. Pascal had little respect for ideas that were only ideas. An idea was everything to Descartes, who knew that he lived only because he thought.

See them face to face: Pascal the witty, the brilliant, with his "pneumatic" face (as the physiognomists say), where the nose, the cheekbones, the brows, are prominent, below a forehead that recedes a little, above a small and slightly retreating chin; note the high arched eyebrows, the dreamy melancholy gaze of the eyes, which remind us of Shelley's. "His luminous genius enchanted all Port-Royal," writes Fontaine in his *Memoirs*. Yes, it is the face of a luminous genius. And then look on that other genius, whose proud and violent visage—obstinate, chimerical, tenacious—daunts us still, with an acrid and dominating glance, as he gazes from the canvas of Franz Hals. When they met in the flesh, they did not at first dislike each other, and Pascal's mysterious illness interested Descartes, who prided himself upon a certain skill in medicine. A few days later the great philosopher sent a friend to the rue Brisemiche to ask if Pascal could receive him on the morrow morning. But here I will pass my pen to Jacqueline Pascal, who was present at the meeting, and who has left a very lively account of it in a letter addressed to her sister, Gilberte Périer, at that time keeping their father's house in Rouen:

PARIS,
Wednesday, September 25, 1647.

MY DEAREST SISTER,

Hitherto, I have put off writing, because I wanted to give you a full report of my brother's conversation with M. Descartes, and I had no time yesterday to tell you that, on Sunday evening, M. Hardy called, accompanied by a Breton gentleman, a M. de Martigny. My brother was out at church, so they asked

to see me instead. This M. de Martigny is a fellow-countryman and friend of M. Descartes, who—so he told this M. de Martigny—wished to see my brother—for he had always heard my father and him so highly spoken of—so he had asked this M. de Martigny to inquire whether a visit would inconvenience my brother, of whose ill-health he was aware; if not, M. Descartes would like to call on the morrow morning about nine o'clock. When I heard that suggestion of a morning call, I really did not know what to say, for I know how my brother hates to be put about, particularly so early in the day, when he does not like to have to use his voice; and yet I did not wish to take it upon myself to refuse. At last we agreed that M. Descartes should call at half-past ten. Well, he came. And with him came M. Hardy, M. de Martigny, a young man in a cassock whose name I do not know, as well as Master de Martigny, the son, and sundry other youths. M. de Roberval was there already, having been invited by my brother. After a few civilities had passed between the gentlemen, the arithmetical machine was exhibited and much admired, M. de Roberval acting showman. After that, they began to talk about the vacuum. M. Descartes, when he had listened to an account of the experiment, said, in reply to my brother (who asked him what he thought could have got into the tube): "Why, a subtle form of matter." My brother answered as best he could, but M. de Roberval, seeing that my brother fetched his voice with difficulty, began attacking M. Descartes (keeping just within the bounds of politeness), who replied, somewhat sourly, that he did not mind debating with my brother, who was a reasonable man, and would talk with him as long as he liked, but that he had nothing to say to M. de Roberval, who, he declared, was influenced by prejudice. Then, looking at his watch and seeing that it was noon, he rose to take his leave, for he had been invited to dine in the Faubourg-Saint-Germain; and so he went, carrying off in his coach M. de Roberval. And they continued to harry and banter each other rather more than was pleasant, as we heard later on from M. de Roberval, who came back to see us in the afternoon. . . .

But I have forgotten to say that M. Descartes, vexed to have been here so short a time, promised to call again on the morrow morning at eight. This second visit was partly to advise my brother as to his health; but he did not give us much of

an opinion after all: he merely told him to lie late a-bed of a morning, until he got tired of his rest, to drink plenty of broth and warm infusions. That was all. They spoke of many other matters, for M. Descartes stayed till eleven o'clock; but what they said I cannot tell you, for I was not there. All day yesterday we were so busy, preparing my brother's first bath and giving it to him. He said it gave him rather a headache, but that was because he took it too hot. I think he is better for having had his foot bled last Sunday evening; it certainly relieved his voice, for he was able on Monday to speak out loud all day, in the morning with M. Descartes and, in the afternoon, with M. de Roberval; indeed, with M. de Roberval he had quite a long discussion, into which entered Theology for at least as large a share as Physics. No harm came of it all, save a sleepless night and a deep sweating, but no trace of the headache which I quite expected after such an effort. . . .

Since he wished to know it, tell M. Adrien Auzoult that the other day my brother did as he asked and wrote to Father Mersenne, begging him to state the arguments that M. Descartes opposed to the existence of atmospheric pressure. And the Father answered in a few lines mightily ill-written (for he has had the artery of his right arm cut in the last bleeding, and they fear that he may be maimed for life), he wrote, then, saying, so far as I can make it out, that it was not M. Descartes but M. de Roberval who opposed the theory, M. Descartes being all in its favour, but according to an argument that my brother does not approve. And, if you see him, tell M. Dumesnil [young Hallé de Mouflaines] that a person who is no longer a mathematician [Pascal], and another that never had any such pretension [herself], greet kindly a mathematician by relapse: M. Auzoult will explain this nonsense to you; I have neither the time nor the patience! Well, farewell, dear Sister. I am your very obedient sister and servant,

J. Pascal.

Auzoult; it is the name of the young mathematician, physicist, future astronomer, who was Pascal's chief companion during his residence in Rouen, and, with Hallé de Mouflaines, his trusty

squire in the hunting of the unfortunate Brother Saint-Ange. A close affection, an enthusiastic friendship, bound young Auzoult to Pascal, by some three years his senior. What more natural than that the invalided genius in Paris should ask his friend in Rouen to test some of his experiments at the glass factory?

There was one, in particular, which created a void within a void; it required a double tube of glass such as it was impossible to find in Paris. Still, more or less successfully, Pascal had contrived to perform it, and he wrote to his brother-in-law, Florin Périer, in November, reminding him how, "ces jours passés," when Périer had been in Paris, they had brought off the difficult experiment together, to their great satisfaction. He was writing to Périer, that November afternoon, to ask him (so soon as the melting of the snows should permit the ascension of the Puy-de-Dôme) to carry to the summit of the mountain those tubes half-filled with quicksilver, which no one as yet had named barometers, carefully noting the variations of the mercury at different levels.

And I fancy that about the same time Pascal must have written to Adrien Auzoult asking him to repeat in more favourable conditions the "Void within the Void." There was no reason for keeping such a letter. It is lost. And this is the difficulty of writing history. More, much more, than half the documents we need are always missing. Blind chance seems to have presided as to the choice of which were kept and which were scattered. We

have to infer, suppose, solicit, the remaining fragments, at our risks and perils. . . .

If I suppose that Pascal wrote to his friend Adrien Auzoult asking him to perform, in excellent conditions, at Rouen, an experiment which he, under great disadvantages, had imagined and more or less produced in Paris, it is, firstly, because Auzoult did most brilliantly exhibit the Void within a Void at the Rouen glass factory in May 1648 ; and, secondly, because in the preceding November, Pascal did write to his brother-in-law, Florin Périer, in Auvergne, begging him (so soon as the snows should permit the ascension of the Puy-de-Dôme) to carry his tubes, with the mercury in them, to the top of the mountain. And in this letter he reminds Florin Périer that " ces jours passés," when Périer had been in Paris, he had, with a double tube, brought off the still more difficult experiment of the Void within a Void, " je le fis ces jours passés en votre présence." So runs the letter dated November 15, 1647.

Why, my reader will say, am I hammering so repeatedly on this unimportant point ? Because of the extraordinary allegations of a certain M. Félix Mathieu. No one doubted Pascal's paternity as regards both the " Great Experiment of the Puy-de-Dôme " (as it is generally called), and the Void within the Void, until, some twenty years ago, a M. Félix Mathieu published in the *Revue de Paris* seven brilliant and extraordinary essays, asserting, with a Swift-like acerbity and a great wealth of argumentation, that Pascal invented neither test : the great experiment of the Puy-de-Dôme being due entirely

to Descartes, while he supposed the Void within the Void to be Adrien Auzoult's invention. Pascal had merely filched the credit from his friend. But the letter ? you will remark. Ah, that letter, dated November 1647, might be a forgery of Florin Périer's, written in 1663, and antedated.

These articles plunged Paris, or at any rate the University of Paris, into a state of consternation which it may be hard to imagine in London. Grave professors, Members of the Institute, walked the street with hanging heads and a funereal expression : " Pascal aurait volé ! Pascal a menti ! " (We saw no such despair during the Great War.) But a few months later, in June 1908, M. Léon Brunschvicg began publishing his glorious edition of Pascal's works. And there is the letter, which M. Félix Mathieu considered to have been written by Florin Périer in 1663 : Pascal himself published it in 1648 ! It was reprinted three times in the seventeenth century ; and no document concerning the history of physics was better known to the savants of that age.

I have often wondered who was this acerb and brilliant M. Félix Mathieu, whom no one ever saw, whom no one ever met (for I have made some inquiries), and who, after such a sensational beginning, suddenly subsided into silence. I used to imagine him to be some Jesuit Father, avenging the wrongs of his Order, but more recently, setting my gun on the other shoulder, I surmised some ardent apostle of Free Thought (for, after all, there is more than one reason for disliking Pascal), and I began to wonder whether the name of Félix Mathieu were

not the mask of the late, the learned, and regretted Librarian of the Ecole Normale, Lucien Herr? And there would be a sort of wild justice in such an assault in disguise, on a writer so prolific of pseudonyms as Blaise Pascal; one can conceive the pleasure of tarring Louis de Montalte with his own brush! But the tar has not stuck. Pascal had a firmer touch in blackening a character.

That Pascal may have gained something by his conversations with Descartes we may well believe. The two greatest minds of their age could not meet but their friction must strike out some spark. We read in the *Pensées* a scathing comment on such authors as always have their mouth full of "*my*" history, "*my*" commentary, "*my* book." "Ils sentent leur bourgeois que ont pignon sur rue et toujours un 'chez moi' à la bouche." Let them modestly say "*our* book, *our* history—for there is a lot of other people's work in everything we do." Descartes, I fear, may have been one of these Philistines. In the Letters recently published by the Clarendon Press we find him writing under the date of December 6, 1647:

"Il me semble que ce jeune homme qui a fait ce livret (sur le Vide) a le Vide un peu trop en sa tête, et qu'il se hâte beaucoup. Je voudrais que le volume qu'il promet fût déjà au jour, afin qu'on pût voir ses raisons, qui seront, si je ne me trompe, aussi peu solides que ce qu'il a entrepris de prouver."

Pascal had plenty of enemies on his hands (without M. Félix Mathieu, of whom, fortunately, he could not know), for there was also a certain Father Noël with whom he had a controversy, at this date, concerning

the possibility of a Void in Nature. The Father was a man of sixty-five, and his white hairs discouraged his young adversary, who dared not be as rude as he would have liked. So Pascal delegated his father to answer in his stead ; but soon he picked up the paternal pen and (disguised in the Intendant's wig and gown) made havoc of the Jesuit. This taking of his father's name is a detail important to Pascal's portrait painter. It is the first sign of what will become so characteristic a trait : that delight in disguises, that love of a freak, of a secret adventure, that almost puerile pleasure in pouncing out from a dark corner, that amusement at throwing dust in his public's eyes, which—no less than his sense of Infinity, his genius and his spirituality—are part of the substance of Pascal.

Polemics were his favourite sport. But Science was his passion. His mind, like Pasteur's in our own times, loved to exhaust all the possibilities of any subject that engrossed it. So, from the quicksilver suspended midway in the tube, he concluded, first of all the existence of a Void in Nature, that subversive doctrine ; secondly, the existence of atmospheric pressure (a conception as tremendous to the men of those days as the discovery of radium to our own, for it proved that we live surrounded by forces which none of our senses suffice to reveal) ; and thirdly, the equilibrium of fluids.

And so he led up to the double invention of the barometer and of that hydraulic press which bears his name.

CHAPTER V

JACQUELINE'S VOCATION

CHARMING Jacqueline Pascal! Her portrait still hangs in the chapel of Port-Royal-des-Champs, a little faded, but still attractive (as *she* was when the smallpox had dimmed the freshness of her cheeks), still bright, because of that sweet arch glance of her blue eyes, and the general air of cheerful purity. Her nose, like her brother's, is long and irregular, having decided to be a hook-nose quite at the close of its career; but it gives force and seriousness to her girlish features. Her conversion had been absolute and immediate to a degree that astonished her brother and sister, for hitherto Jacqueline had not been over-fond of monks and nuns. The poetic, intellectual young girl looked down on their lack of culture, their want of logic. She had (recalled her elder sister) "a certain contempt for converts, seeing in them a constant practice of things: 'peu capables de satisfaire un esprit raisonnable.'" But at Port-Royal, she declared, "l'on pouvait être religieuse raisonnablement."

These passionate Pascals! Such is their cult of reason that they must find a logical excuse for the fire that consumes them! Jacqueline's overthrow was complete, and M. Singlin told her brother that

he had never seen such evident signs of a monastic vocation.

No one at Port-Royal would have said as much for Blaise. Pascal had been disappointed by his reception there. Accustomed to reign over the youth of Rouen, treated as a prodigy by the mathematicians of his father's circle, he found among his new friends a coldness, a sort of aloofness, which he could not understand. And, in fact, the fame and the flame of this young Pascal disconcerted the discreet and sober votaries of Saint-Augustine. They asked for humility; he offered them genius and fervour. Hence their unwelcoming attitude. Distrustful and perplexed, they hesitated to employ the passionate activity of this fiery, strange and self-assured young man whose intellectual pride and combative ambitions seemed so remote from the spirit of sacrifice. Pascal proposed "to prove, according to the principles of common sense, the truth of many things supposed to be the contrary of common sense"; but in this challenge, flung down to all enemies of Jansenism, the diffident M. Singlin saw little but "vanity, and a rash confidence in human reason." The saints of Port-Royal mistrusted their eager neophyte, all alive with the *libido sciendi*, the *libido dominandi*: the lust of knowledge and the lust of power. And their modest moderation, their humble, mediocre, selfless style offended their convert. Had he fallen on Antoine Arnauld, instead of on M. Singlin and M. de Rebours, Pascal would have had more in common with his mentor. But M. Singlin started back when Pascal, generously,

offered to place his pen at the service of Port-Royal. Was this contrition? Was this meekness? Pascal was no happier in an interview with M. de Rebours, and, discouraged, he writes to his sister, Gilberte Périer:

"Toute cette entrevue se passa dans cette équivoque et dans un embarras qui a continué dans toutes les autres et qui ne s'est pu débrouiller" (*Pensées et Opuscules*, ed. Brunschvicg, p. 85).

Thrown back upon himself, Pascal gradually returned to the study of physics, in which he was acquiring a great reputation. Yet he encouraged Jacqueline in her sacrifice, as though her enthusiasm redeemed his own backsliding. He was all sympathy, yet he knew that one day—the day when she should take the veil—he must lose the companionship of this sweet sister, secretary and nurse. That was, perhaps, the oblation which Heaven required of *him*: the offering up of his one ewe-lamb—not any personal immolation.

Gilberte, at Rouen, was informed of these engagements, still unconfirmed, regarding the future rather than the present. An absolute confidence reigned between Jacqueline, Gilberte and Blaise. But not a word was said by any of them to their devoted father, who, at Rouen, is working night and day to secure for them the utmost comfort and advantage. Etienne Pascal was kept in the dark.

Meanwhile political events were stirring, agitating France, agitating even the peace of Port-Royal. Richelieu had died in 1642, and there was a great reaction against the system of that dictator of

genius, whose successor, Cardinal Mazarin, was even more absolute than he and far less popular; for was he not a foreigner, by birth an Italian, an ultramontane priest? The Fronde was already rumbling in the distance, and soon the Fronde in arms was clamouring for greater liberties, for fewer taxes, for a reform of the financial system, and much else besides.

Etienne Pascal was one of Richelieu's creatures. The people in arms exacted the repeal of the Intendants.

> "Maudits tyranneaux, demy-princes,
> Malheurs attachés aux provinces."

He escaped dismissal by sending in his resignation just before the whole system of Intendants was abolished. In recognition of his services he was made a Privy-Councillor, and appeared in Paris, not ungloriously, in 1648, paying a short visit to Blaise and Jacqueline in the month of May before he returned to Rouen to finish winding up his affairs.

The good, tired, anxious man was wholly unprepared to find his children so completely under the spell of Port-Royal, and Jacqueline already proposing to enter a convent. Neither son nor daughter ventured to undeceive him. But M. Singlin insisted that the father must be informed, and Blaise at last dared the deed. The most loving, the most liberal of parents, Etienne Pascal was also one of the most authoritative. His wrath was great. "You know to what lengths family affection can run in our house?" Jacqueline was to remind her

brother one day, not without bitterness. Violently angry, the father refused his consent—and returned to Rouen. It was there that he received from Jacqueline a very touching and beautiful letter, begging him to let her enter Port-Royal, even though it were only for a few weeks of retirement and spiritual refreshment.

"There (she pleads) I can much more truly ascertain if this be indeed the sacrifice that God requires of me. There I can listen to the voice of God, *sola cum solus*. And there, perchance, I may discover that I was not born for the conventual life; should that be so, we will say no more about it. And if God should bring home to me that my true destiny is the religious life, why, still I promise you, dear father, that you shall choose the hour, while I will await your permission without anxiety or uneasiness."

Innocent wiles of Jacqueline! But the angry, disappointed father was hurt beyond all balm of such blandishments. He renewed his refusal, and gave his daughter in charge to that nurse, Louise Delfaut, who had brought up both her and Blaise from infancy, bidding the woman keep watch and ward over her nurslings of yesterday even as when they had been little children; especially he told her to see that they opened no communication with Port-Royal, either by letter or by word of mouth. Parental authority was no vain word in 1648.

Early in July Etienne Pascal was back in Paris, and was moving from his house in the rue Brisemiche to another situate in the rue de Touraine, in the fashionable quarter of the Marais. During his exile in Rouen, the Intendant must often have looked forward to the days when he should resume his old

pursuits, enjoy some leisure, meet old friends again. But the hour when a prominent official quits an important post, to become a social unit in a private station, is usually full of disappointments. Old Pascal's son was an invalid ; his daughter, against his wish, desired to be a nun. In that new quarter she paid no visits and neglected her old acquaintance. Even in the household she retired from the world, spending most of her time alone in her own chamber. *Beata solitudo, sola beatitudo.* Was this that bright Jacqueline who had been as the flame upon the hearth ?

Despite the constraint put upon her (and perhaps in the end abetted by her nurse), she found means to escape from time to time to the Jansenist Church, to write letters, to receive them—and this sustained her in the lonely combat against her father's will. Gilberte Périer—" ma fidèle," as Jacqueline always called her—could not make up her mind to leave this unhappy household, divided against itself, and lingered on in the rue de Touraine, although two little girls, three and four years of age, were waiting for her return to Clermont.

(One of these children, years afterwards, remembered, and set down in writing, the mother's long-deferred home-coming, quite at the end of the summer, after an absence of two years ; recalling the hour when her little daughters ran to meet her, decked out by their grandparents in trimmings of silver braid and lace and fringes, according to the fashion of the time—how Gilberte, in her Jansenist ardour, had stripped them of all these vain adorn-

ments, reducing them to plainest serge, in which, no doubt, they looked a great deal nicer.)

Florin Périer, too, had returned to Clermont, after much journeying to and fro on his business in the Administration. At once he set to work on that great experiment of the Puy-de-Dôme, in which he faithfully followed the instructions of Blaise Pascal, carrying the tubes from the bottom to the top of the mountain and noting how, at different altitudes, the quicksilver rose and fell. The brilliant success, the immediate fame of this test, which established the reality of atmospheric pressure, and set the name of Pascal high in the list of men of science, did much, no doubt, to restore a harmony between a father and a son so passionately attached to each other, after all, and both alike so much absorbed in Physics. For that experiment of the Puy-de-Dôme was at least as important to the progress of science in the seventeenth century as were, in our own times, those observations of an eclipse which established Einstein's theory. Under its happy influence the misunderstanding between a devoted father and his children seems to have drifted away, like mists in sunshine; and we find Blaise Pascal, early in November 1648, writing to his sister in Auvergne:

"Ta lettre nous a fait ressouvenir d'une brouillerie dont on avait perdu la mémoire, tant elle est absolument passée." ("Your letter calls back to mind a disagreement which had utterly slipped our memory, so entirely is it a thing of the past.")

And he goes on to say that he and Jacqueline have succeeded in bringing their father round to

their point of view at least in so far that he is no longer cross or embittered.

In April 1649 they made an arrangement. Etienne Pascal was sixty years of age and his health was beginning to fail ; he begged his daughter not to desert him in his old age, to stay with him until his dying day. And he promised in return to do nothing to oppose her final entrance into Port-Royal. Moreover, he gave his word that, so long as she lived under his roof, she should keep the rule of her Order and live the religious life. There was peace in the home, and there was peace, too, in the streets outside. For, just as the Pascals had patched up an agreement, entirely satisfactory to neither party, so the King and his subjects had called a truce : it was, in fact, no more than a truce. And the trance of dullness, unsatisfaction, frustrated hopes, which follows an imperfect victory, had settled down over Paris. Father Mersenne was dead, his circle broken up ; the Périers were in Auvergne. In May the ex-Intendant decided to leave the capital in order to join his married daughter, and set out, with Blaise, with Jacqueline, on the difficult, week-long, sometimes dangerous journey which in those days divided Paris from Clermont in Auvergne.

Doubtless, in his heart of hearts, M. Pascal thought that the come-and-go of a large household, the atmosphere of her native town, the visits of a large family connection, might change the thoughts of

Jacqueline and divert her attention from Port-Royal; while that last panacea, his native air, might restore the health of Blaise, for whom the physicians had prescribed a period of mental relaxation as the sole hope of a cure.

Young Pascal, at least, seems to have enjoyed his cordial welcome and his celebrity in the place where he was born. But Jacqueline, who of old had been the sociable member of the household, persisted in her obdurate retreat. The Périers were building themselves, just outside the city gates, a fine large house at Bienassis; but their quarters in town, where four children lived with their parents, were narrow for so large an influx of guests, and Jacqueline was lodged in a little cabinet where it was impossible to light a fire. There, however, she stayed in the coldest weather (which may surprise one at any time of the year in that mountain climate); there she sat, reading her Bible; there she knelt, saying her prayers, devoted to the same exact solitude, the same mysterious and sequestered diligence, that had so grieved her family in Paris. She had taken Gilberte into her confidence and had begged her to let it be known, when so many cousins called to see her, that she was, so to speak, but a nun in disguise, already relieved from worldly obligations; a nun whom the sole consideration of a parent's health kept from the shelter of her convent. And the tribes of the Pascals, the Bégons, and the Périers beheld without offence an austere young girl of three-and-twenty, dressed simply and even poorly in clothes that seemed made for an old

woman (flat shoes, no stays, short hair under a cap), who returned their first call, as politeness required, but was seen no more, save at church, or at the Périer's dinner-table. Even Gilberte could enjoy her sister's society only for the too brief space of these walks to church and back. But sometimes one might encounter Jacqueline in the street, hurrying to the Hospital, her arms full of woollen vests and stockings which she had knitted for the poor during the interminable hours of her silence and her solitude.

If anyone fell sick in the household, then Jacqueline would leave her retreat and devote herself entirely to the sufferer. During those eighteen months that she spent in Auvergne, one of her small nieces was taken with the smallpox, and Jacqueline barely left the child's bedside; but when, after a fortnight's illness, the little girl succumbed, then the postulant of Port-Royal went back to her retirement.

One day a priest of the Oratory, whom she admitted to her seclusion, told her that, instead of reading and knitting, she ought to use in the service of God and Mother Church her gift of poetry, and translate into French verse the Latin hymns of the Missal. With a timid joy, Jacqueline began this task—which Racine was so beautifully to accomplish a few years later. Her first effort, the Hymn for the Ascension, filled the Oratorian with delight; he bade her continue; and the half-frightened poetess sent her verses (very stiff and strained they seem to us) to Mother Agnès, the Prioress of Port-Royal,

asking her whether a task so harmonious to her taste could be compatible with the practice of penitence. But the Prioress was a woman of taste, and she replied that Jacqueline's poetry was "a talent of which God would ask her no account." Let her serve Him otherwise in all simplicity. None the less, a little later, Port-Royal sent its exile a theme to develop in prose—a Mystery of the Passion of Jesus—of which Jacqueline's rendering was highly praised. Doubtless Pascal saw it, either then or afterwards, and, some years later, remembering this exercise of Jacqueline's, he will compose a meditation which is, perhaps, the most beautiful of all those ever written by enraptured saints. We shall read it later on.

There was no sign of this in 1649. Jacqueline's correspondence with the Prioress shows us how grieved she was about her brother's soul. He seemed a renegade from grace. We do not possess her letters, but in the answers of the Prioress (published in MM. Brunschvicg and Boutroux's second volume) we can read the secret of Jacqueline's tormented spirit. Beneath that affable exterior, beneath that affectionate smile, there reigned something like despair. She is "inconsolable" for her long exile from Port-Royal. "How you exaggerate!" retorts the Prioress. Her banishment, writes Jacqueline, has but one merit in her eyes: it may achieve the conversion of a person very dear; but progress is very slow, if progress there be. "God often delays the harvest in a soul He loves," answers Mère Agnès. "Pray for this person, pray; and do not speak to

him often of religion, save by example, which is a language all who run may read."

"Give us news of your disciple (she writes another day). "His spark is but faint and would speedily be quenched, I fear, if you were not beside him. And be obedient to your father, who is set over you by God, and has the right to crucify you by fixing you in a place where you remain against your will."

Who is this disciple, so precious, whose conversion is prayed for by these pious ladies? for whose sake Jacqueline endures her "crucifixion" at Clermont? A person (we are told) whose reason is fully persuaded, but not his heart; a person so eminent that if Jacqueline succeed in bringing him within the fold, God will grant her that immunity from sin which is His Paradise!

Evidently it is Blaise Pascal. While his sister was chafing and fretting at her bondage, slowly acquiring that discipline of patience so hard to learn for these impassioned Pascals, Blaise was drifting farther and farther day by day from the austere ideal of Port-Royal.

The father and the son were the centre of intellectual society in Clermont. A generation later, their legend was handed down to the children of their friends.

"Le père de M. Pascal, l'esprit (writes the son of Domat to Brossette)—the father of M. Pascal, the genius, was the Intendant of Normandy and a native of Auvergne, whither he brought his son, who at that time was in his eighteenth or nineteenth year. What good care the father used to take of him! It was extraordinary! The two of them gave lectures on Science at the house of M. de Ribeyre, the grandfather of the present man. My father once was present at one of these meetings, and it was there that he made the acquaintance of

the two MM. Pascal. They liked each other from the start, and M. Pascal the elder asked my father to be his son's friend. And from that day, so long as they lived, they loved each other exceedingly. There were often other lectures, which they used to attend together. They both loved mathematics, liked to study side by side, and sometimes would test the vacuum in a tube."

So, fifty years later, the legend ran. It was this young Domat (although a learned legist rather than a painter) who has left us the best portrait of Pascal, drawn on the flyleaf of a folio. And Pascal, in fact, does look about eighteen, although at that time he was already nearly twenty-eight.

All through that spring and summer of 1650, Blaise Pascal and Florin Périer were busy with their experiments, which they communicated to their friends—to Chanut, for instance, in Stockholm (where a sudden attack of influenza had recently carried off Descartes), and to others in various parts of the earth. They collected observations from various quarters as to the influence which weather and climate, no less than altitude, exercised on the mercury in the barometer. We find Chanut writing to Périer:

"Je souhaite de tout mon cœur que M. Pascal, votre beau-frère, qui a le temps, et un esprit merveilleux, trouve en cette matière quelque ouverture de conséquence pour la Physique."

These studies, experiments, letters, observations, were still in full fling when, in November 1650, Etienne Pascal decided to take Blaise and Jacqueline back to Paris.

Scarce had they struck their tents when there was a reaction in Clermont. These Pascals had occupied the scene too exclusively. In that very drawing-

room of M. de Ribeyre, where they had given so many lectures, a Jesuit Father was heard to say :

" That Certain Persons overmuch in love with new ideas give themselves out for the inventors of an experiment whose true author was the sole Torricelli. Though it has been tested in Poland they do none the less entirely attribute it to their own invention and, having first of all tried it on in Normandy, have recently published it as such in Auvergne."

A candid friend, probably Domat, immediately acquainted the Pascals with this calumny. Neither father nor son bore any love to the Jesuits, and their long-standing prejudice was probably deepened by this allegation of a complacent old Father who chiefly was eager to expatiate on an experiment of his own. Blaise Pascal at once took up his pen and, in a letter to M. de Ribeyre, avenged his honour as a man of science.

" I beg you, Sir, to consider that among men of science it is thought as great a crime to steal another man's invention as, in the civil world, to usurp his possessions. . . . No one is obliged to be learned, just as no one is obliged to be rich ; there is nothing to wince at in the reproach of ignorance (which haply may recoil on the head of him who proffered it), but a man of honour cannot let himself be called a thief, lest it be supposed that silence gives consent."

Father and son discussed the matter with passion and excitement. Meanwhile Jacqueline in her cabinet was meditating on the Mystery of Jesus.

After a short illness, through which his daughter Jacqueline nursed him night and day, Etienne Pascal

died on September 24, 1651. For the first time in Blaise's remembrance (his mother having died when he was three years old) he found himself face to face with the King of Terrors. How full of awe was that encounter we can tell from a letter that the bereaved son addressed to the Périers some three weeks later, tense and high in tone, stern in its elevation. I will quote some fragments. There is no comfort, he warns them, to be found in memory and affection, which but inflame the wound. The mourner's sole resource is to rise on the pinions of the soul into the very bosom of the Eternal, and learn there to accept the will of God.

"Let us not say: 'Had we done this!' or 'Had we thought of that!' Of what avail such scruples since we are not free? In the beginnings of time God willed that the blow should fall, just when it fell; our duty is to accept His just decree.

"The Pagan says: 'Death is the term of life.' If that were so, the grave indeed were sheer corruption. But, to the Christian's eye, death is a penance setting free the soul, associating it with the death of Jesus, and so admitting it to eternal life.

"Yet in the hour of parting the instinctive horror of the flesh is difficult to daunt. Let us remember that all we love on earth is but a faint foreshadowing of the eternal life; while Death's corporeal terrors are the vain reflection of that true death which kills the soul. Fearing which, and the loss of our beatitude, we shall no longer shudder at the death of the body.

"Prayer and sacrifice are a remedy for all our pains. Let us mourn our beloved. Yet (once I learned it from a holy man) of all we do or pray in their remembrance, there is no charity so truly profitable as to conform our lives to the advice they gave us, when they dwelt with us on earth. Doing their will, following their counsel, putting ourselves into that state of being which they desired for us, we keep beside us those we mourn; and so our dead are never dead, for they prolong, throughout our whole existence, their wise activity and guide us still."

"If I had lost my father six years earlier, then had I been indeed but a lost man! I needed him beside me ten years longer. But let us hope that God withdrew his soul as it was best to further his salvation."

Broken in heart and health, bereft at one blow of his support and his companion—that father whose "extraordinary care" had so astonished young Domat—and the lonelier because the birth of another little Périer retained Gilberte in Auvergne, Pascal relied exclusively on Jacqueline. That he and Jacqueline should live together, was it not that state of being which their dead father especially desired? Could she exact that he should lose, at one fell sweep, everything that made life comfortable and desirable? They were not rich. While Etienne Pascal lived the whole family had enjoyed his income and his pensions. All that remained now was his private fortune, which the notary would divide into three parts. On two of these portions, Blaise and Jacqueline could keep house together. While the lawyers were at work upon the will, Blaise begged his sister to remain with him for at least a year: "pour luy aider à se résoudre dans le malheur." By that time he hoped that the arithmetical machine, for which he had recently received a new patent, might bring in sufficient profit to mend his fortunes.

When Pascal spoke to Jacqueline of the need he had of her society and assistance, he used a tone so confident and so self-assured that she was afraid to contradict, and listened in silence. But she was absolutely resolved to enter Port-Royal without delay.

Two days after that epistle to the Périers, Blaise and Jacqueline signed a whole series of documents which the notaries had prepared. Jacqueline's dowry was about twenty-five thousand crowns. Did she, in her feminine ignorance of law, understand that, in these contracts, she willed it all away to her brother in return for an annuity of one thousand seven hundred livres tournois; which, should she marry and die young, would be paid to her widower; but which, by a most singular restriction, would not be paid to herself should she become a nun? "Should the said damsel enter religion, her income shall expire on the day she takes the veil." Ungenerous and extraordinary reservation! Thus, doubtless, did Etienne Pascal, from his grave, seek to provide for the comfort and happiness of the delicate, gifted son that he adored, "M. Pascal l'esprit," M. Pascal the genius.

Jacqueline signed; and then she wrote to Mother Agnès, begging that the nuns of Port-Royal might pray for the true conversion of her brother, and also for the change of heart of that "demoiselle qui m'a tant persécutée," her old nurse, Louise Delfaut.

By the end of November Gilberte Périer arrived in Paris and found her brother innocently planning his future existence with Jacqueline, while she, on the other hand, was silently meditating a sudden flight. Gilberte's narrative is so beautiful and so pathetic that I will not mar it, save by translation.

"She told me that her intention was to take the veil so soon as all the notaries' business should be finished, but that she would spare my brother's feelings by letting him still think

that she was only going to Port-Royal for a brief retreat. The property was divided on the last day of December 1651, and she arranged her departure for the 4th of January.

"On the eve of that day she begged me, as we were going to bed, to say a few words to my brother to prepare him for the morrow. But, despite all my care, though I merely said she was leaving us for a retreat, to see what sort of life was lived in a convent, my brother was cut to the heart. He went into his room, very sad, without trying to see my sister, who had indeed withdrawn into a little cabinet of which she had made an oratory. Nor did she leave its shelter till my brother had retired for the night, fearing lest the sight of her as she passed should be too much for him. Again I repeated to him her kind and tender messages, and we all went to bed. But, though from the bottom of my heart I consented to what she was doing, believing it all for the best, nevertheless the grandeur of such a resolution astonished me and filled my mind so full that all night long I could not close my eyes. Towards seven in the morning, as she showed no sign of stirring, I thought that perhaps she also had not slept, and, fearing she might be ill, I went over to her bed, and there she lay, fast asleep. The rustle of my movement awoke her, and she asked what time it was, and said she felt very well and had enjoyed a good sleep. Then she got up, dressed, went out, doing this, like every other action of her life, in an equal and tranquil spirit hard to compass. We did not bid each other farewell for fear of bursting into tears. So, when I saw that she was ready to leave the room, I turned aside. In this manner my sister left the world. It was the 4th of January 1652, and she was aged twenty-six years and three months."

Although as a rule the Order exacted a year's probation, Jacqueline had lived so long, as it were, in the porch of the Convent, that she was permitted to take the white veil of a novice on the following Trinity Sunday. She did so, despite her brother's eager protest. Several times he went to see her, at Port-Royal-de-Paris, entreating, beseeching, urging a delay. Could she not put it off two years ? twelve

months ? six months ? a fortnight ? Jacqueline shook her white-veiled head that Blaise would never again see bent over some quiet household task. At last he gave his consent, and made a provision in his will of four thousand livres, which, in case he should die childless, he bequeathed to Port-Royal after his decease.

A year later Jacqueline prepared to take the last irrevocable vows.

" He came the next day to the convent, sick with vexation and a miserable headache (so wrote the sister in Paris to the sister in Auvergne), and all the same much gentler than he used to be, for instead of begging me to put off my profession for two years, as he did the last time, he merely asked me to wait until All Saints . . . and then gave way, having pity on my despair at having to defer once more a thing I have so long desired. . . . It seems a dream to see it come so close at last after so much opposition."

At this point Jacqueline wrote to her brother and sister saying she would like to give twenty thousand francs, taken from her dowry, to the House in which she was to spend her life, a professed nun. Alas for human nature! To give an unwilling consent is one thing, to give one's fortune another, and, under their father's will, Blaise and Gilberte considered themselves entitled to the sum. The Périers had a large young family to bring up. Pascal, accustomed to a rich father's generous housekeeping, had been living beyond his narrowed means. They were Auvergnats, not inclined to part with their money. " Will you disinherit us (they both wrote back) for the sake of strangers ?"

" I had not thought to find them still so human,

so unspiritual," complained Jacqueline to the Prioress of Port-Royal. She did not think she had wronged her relations, since she proposed to leave them two-thirds of her inheritance; she thought they could not refuse her what she still considered her due, despite that clause in the will; for a woman finds it hard to admit the letter of the law. But here intervened the old Abbess of Port-Royal, Mother Angélique Arnauld, who told Jacqueline that she did not understand the spirit of the Order if she thought Port-Royal would accept an unblessed, unwilling gift. *Her*, they would accept, but not her money. And at the thought of entering the Order empty-handed Jacqueline was covered with shame and confusion.

"Think, dear Mother," she wrote to the Abbess, "in what a state I was when I read their letters (for each of them wrote to me), so different from their usual style. They said I could not have a penny unless I went to law with them. They said it would take four years or more to disentangle our portions. And must I wait four years on the mere hope of disentangling a part of my dowry, or enter the Order with nothing in my hand?"

But what wrung Jacqueline's heart more deeply than her wounded pride, hurt at being taken out of charity and penniless, was wounded love: that those she held dearest of all things in this world could so belittle her. For her sake they would do nothing, and nothing for the Love of God. Mère Angélique was less astonished than she.

"You see, my Child, they are still of this world. In spite of all their graces and their illumination as to things divine, children of this world they remain, and self-interest is the

principle of all their doings. You would not do like them? But then, you see, you have left the world and its works. . . . As for your brother, you know well that he is caught in a mesh of vanity and vain amusements. And you ask him to bestow in alms money that he might spend on his own personal comfort! You thought he loved you enough to sacrifice himself? It was an impossible hope! It could not have come to pass, short of a miracle: I mean a miracle of nature and affection—for as for expecting a miracle of Grace in a person such as he, it were past praying for!"

Port-Royal looked at Pascal as an apostate. Other young men might go to the play, lose money at cards, tear about the country in a coach and four; they had not received a Call. And Pascal, at Rouen, had received a Call. He had put his hand to the plough and then turned back. From such a one expect no miracle. And yet the miracle happened—brought about, no doubt, by nature and affection rather than by grace. Pascal, who had been absent on a visit to the Périers in Clermont, appeared one day in the parlour at Port-Royal-de-Paris and asked to see Sister Jacqueline de Sainte-Euphémie. Jacqueline came in, looking a little sad—a little mournful. Her brother, taking the offensive, began to complain of her conduct, until at last, cheerfulness breaking through, she said with a flash of her natural gaiety, that she would be silly to grieve, since she had got what she wanted, and that, though she could not pay her way, the Order was kind enough to receive her out of charity. Out of charity! That word set Pascal beside himself. He offered to take on his sole self the expense of his sister's dowry. Mother Angélique then bade him, rather sternly,

examine his heart: Was the sacrifice a willing sacrifice? Port-Royal demanded not good works alone, but the secret consent and intention of the heart. Astonished, almost mystified, the young man withdrew.

A few days later (June 4, 1653) Pascal signed a document which assigned to Port-Royal an income of fifteen hundred livres tournois in Government stock. Two days later he wrote to Florin Périer:

"My sister pronounced her vows yesterday (Thursday, June 5, 1653). It was impossible to put it off any longer. The Gentlemen of Port-Royal feared that a slight delay might entail a greater one. They excuse their haste by alleging that they hope to advance her the sooner to some post of honour. So, at least, they protest. Anyhow, I could do nothing. . . ."

It seems to me we hear an exasperated sigh.

CHAPTER VI

VANITY FAIR

THE nun's vocation had produced in her brother a singular but not unnatural reaction: in his anger and distress at losing Jacqueline he swerved impatiently away from the religious ideal which had been his deep preoccupation and flung himself into the worldly life. He had the greater excuse that his health was bad and his doctors besought him to try the effect of a prolonged and complete relaxation.

"He could not live doing nothing (writes his niece, Marguerite Périer). If the study of science did not occupy his mind, nor religious meditation absorb him, he must find some object to pursue and, in default of work, turned to pleasure. So he accepted social engagements, at first very moderately, but gradually the taste for it grew upon him and he lived for the world and its works, without any sort of vice or irregularity, but in a round of vain amusement. After his father's death, his resources then being all in his own hands, he went out more and more, until he came to lead the usual mundane life, and even thought of accepting some office under the Crown and taking to himself a wife."

Both Marguerite Périer and her mother Gilberte —and, indeed, Pascal himself on more than one occasion—expressly mention that this frivolous life was "free from vice or irregularity." Yet, in the June of 1926, the lovers of Pascal were startled by a communication in the newspapers to the effect

that M. Edouard Herriot, reading in the Manuscript Department of the Bibliothèque Nationale, had come across a document in the Register of Legitimizations for the year 1653, recording the birth of Jean Pascal, natural son of Blaise Pascal, *secrétaire du Roi*, and of Anne Charmat, spinster. The first impression was one of stupor. The year 1653 is, in fact, the period of Pascal's dissipation ; the year in which he had thought of marrying ; was it also the year in which he had seduced a young girl ? . . . On reflection, several difficulties presented themselves. Pascal was not a *secrétaire du Roi*, for he held no sort of office ; he was an *écuyer*, an Esquire, and this title, which follows his signature in all official documents, is not mentioned here. He was not the only Blaise Pascal. He had been christened after his great-grandfather, more than one of whose descendants bore the name, and in 1653 not only Pascal's uncle (his father's younger brother), but also a distant cousin, Blaise Pascal, Seigneur du Montel, were his namesakes : the latter, a notary and a financier, was, precisely, a *secrétaire du Roi*. True, he was a married man ; but, under the *ancien Régime*, it was possible for a married man to give legal status to a natural child (the example of Louis XIV is a case in point) and, without soaring so high, the very item which precedes that of Jean Pascal, in the Register of legitimatized births, records the legal status given to the child of a doctor, a married man, who had seduced his wife's young cousin.

These facts I ascertained when, a few days later (having obtained from the studious Premier the

title of the document in question), I visited the manuscript room of the Paris Library. But I found out nothing more. A glance showed me that the inscription in the Register was merely the title of an Act ; I asked for the Act, hoping for further details. But the Act itself had been burned, nearly two hundred years ago, in the great fire that consumed the Cour des Comptes in 1727. We shall never know who was the father of Anne Charmat's little boy ! I have placed all the facts before my reader ; let me add that neither in Pascal's will, nor in his private papers, nor in the many notices of his life, nor in all the discussions (often very rancorous) which have raged about his name, is there any mention of the existence of a natural son. Perhaps the state of Pascal's health forbade such a supposition. The child, Jean Pascal, was, I am convinced, the son of the Seigneur du Montel. The great Pascal's dissipations certainly included no act so base as the debauching of a girl. Let me open again the *Memoir* of Pascal's sister, Madame Périer. She notes his feeble health :

"The doctors bade him seek some amusement that might occupy him without strain of mental effort. Conversation seemed the sole resource. What else could relax the mind of a man like my brother ? And how could such as he take any pleasure in it ? At first, indeed, he found it difficult to be worldly. But in the pursuit of health (which is indeed a sacred deposit of which God will ask an account) he let himself be persuaded.

"This was certainly the season of his life that was the least well employed. For though (thank God's mercy !) he always was preserved from any sort of vice, yet he grew accustomed to a fashionable atmosphere which is utterly unlike the breath of the Gospel."

It was at first no very prodigal worldliness, for Pascal, reared in luxury, was poor. He moved from the rue de Touraine to smaller quarters in the rue Beaubourg. The married sister of the nurse who had brought him up acted as his housekeeper—one Françoise Pinel by name. He had a faithful valet, Duchesne (who accompanied him on his visits and travels), a housemaid and a cook, a coach and horse. His expenses were considerable, and the state of his health increased them, by constant medical attendance. And he lived in the hope that one day soon the reckoning machine might add its golden profits to a straitened income.

At this time he gave several lectures, probably in the drawing-room of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, Richelieu's niece, who had befriended him in his childhood: the *Rhyming Gazette* tells of one of them in which Pascal exhibited his reckoning machine to a brilliant audience. He had just sent a copy of it to the young Queen of Sweden, that Virgin-queen enthroned in the north, who drew to her glacial Court the wise men of Europe. Descartes had just died there; a place was empty; perhaps Pascal supposed that he might be invited to fill it?

The flower of fashion thronged to Pascal's lectures:

> "Tant Duchesses que Cordons-bleus,
> Pour voir les effets merveilleux
> D'un ouvrage d'arithmétique. . . .
> Où, par un secret sans égal,
> Son rare auteur, nommé Pascal,
> Fit admirer un grand projet."

It was on one of these occasions that Pascal came into contact with a young man who was henceforth to be his closest friend—even dearer, perhaps, than Domat in Auvergne. This friend was then four-and-twenty years of age, and Pascal could remember having noticed him when, six or seven years earlier, he and Jacqueline had first returned from Rouen to their father's house in the rue Brisemiche. But seven years ago; and this young Duke of Roannez, who had seemed almost a child, was a man of importance Governor of the Province of Poitou: a considerable charge. And Pascal admired the advantages of noble birth which could place so new a man in a position to which he could not have aspired on his own merits under fifty years of age. The Governor took his duties seriously, often spending the autumn and winter in Poitou on his estates. He was the only bachelor Duke in France at that moment, and the hope of every heiress, but mathematics alone stirred his fancy. Fatherless, left an orphan at the age of nine, he lived with his mother and a younger sister, still a girl. The Dowager Duchess, a daughter of M. Hennequin, a president in parliament, had probably been married for her dowry, and was by birth in no wise Pascal's superior.

The two young men soon became fast friends, and the Duke offered Pascal a set of chambers in his Paris mansion, which the latter accepted, while keeping on his home in the rue Beaubourg. In those days it was customary for men of great position, with their huge houses, their abundance of servants and equipages, to attach to their persons some man

of letters or science, who had free quarters there, and came and went at will. Thus Etienne Pascal's friend, the mathematician Le Pailleur, had his suite of rooms in the house of the Maréchale de Thémines, "sans gages ny appointements mais seulement comme amy de la maison"; so La Fontaine will live in the house of the Marquise de la Sablière, and the mathematician Carcavy in the mansion of the Duc de Liancourt. When, at the end of the summer, the Duke of Roannez, with his mother, his sister, and a company of friends, left Paris for Poitou, he persuaded his new friend to accompany him, and Pascal accepted, nothing loath. The empty house in the rue Beaubourg must have seemed cold and dull to a sick man accustomed all his days to be the idol of his family. The journey was made in great part by river and not too tiring, for what is a river if not a road that walks? The climate of Poitou is mild; and thence, when the snows on the hills of Auvergne should free the passes, it would be easy to gain the house of Gilberte Périer in Clermont. The Duke (who was a great lover of geometry) took with him an amateur mathematician supposed to be the finest-mannered gentleman in France: a very phœnix of fashion, the Chevalier de Méré. He was a brilliant wit in his way; Leibnitz, in later days, will qualify him as "vir ingeniosus sed semi-doctus." His conversation made a considerable impression upon Pascal.

And Pascal made a considerable impression upon the Chevalier de Méré, though not exactly the impression we should expect. Here it is:

"I went a journey with the D.D.R. (Duc de Roannez), a man whose sensible and profound conversation I invariably find very pleasing. He took with him M. Miton, who, as you know, is the charmer of the Court. It was not so much a journey as a long excursion; we went by water; we only thought of enjoying ourselves, and discussed every possible subject. The D.D.R. has a mathematical mind, and with a view to his entertainment on the way he had made provision of a friend on the further verge of youth [Pascal was barely thirty], who was not much known in those days, but who since then has made a great stir in the world. This person was a sound mathematician, and he was nothing more. These abstract sciences do not give their devotees the tone of society, and he had nothing of the man of taste or the man of tact. He would burst in on our talk, whatever we were saying, so abruptly that he made us laugh. He admired the eloquence of such old-fashioned authors as M. du Vair, and in all innocence he would regale us with the good stories of a bygone generation. We did not attempt his education, but after the lapse of two or three days he appeared to wake up to his deficiencies, listened more than he discoursed, began to ask questions, and sometimes he would draw out a set of tablets and note down a remark. The odd thing is that, before we reached Poitiers, he said scarce anything but what was excellent, and much the same as we should have said ourselves. And, by my faith! he had made this progress from small beginnings! The joy he showed at having thus acquired a new turn of mind was so visible that I think a man scarcely could be happier. . . . After that journey he thought less of mathematics, which had hitherto been his chief preoccupation. He was like a man who has abjured a religion."

Though he had not abjured mathematics, it is true that Pascal had acquired *l'esprit de finesse*, or rather on this journey to Poitou he discovered that he already possessed it. It was a side of his nature hitherto unknown to him. For, after all, what are we? A sheaf of possibilities, out of which Circumstance chooses one or two ingredients to develop, leaving the rest to perish. We are each and all of us

a collection of living beings, of whom the stronger have devoured the less, and thus, to a great extent, we are the sport of our environment. Pascal, educated in a circle of geometers, without a mother, without school-fellows, had grown up accustomed to consider that number, time, space, movement, are the essential things in life ; to think of them and of little else but them, and to express their relations by the sole exercise of Reason. Chance as much as Nature had filled him with the Spirit of Geometry. He now discovered that the mind is moved no less (and sometimes more swiftly and sometimes more surely) by another influence which he called the Spirit of Finesse, and which we name, in its different degrees, inspiration, intuition, sympathy, tact. Pascal was to say one day that a great mind ought to dispose of either spirit. If Descartes, immortal genius as he was, had seemed repellent to Pascal, it was because, possessing in the highest degree the *esprit de géométrie*, he had nothing of the *esprit de finesse*. Reason, logic, abstract thought had borne Descartes very high, so high that he lost all contact with the natural world or its atmosphere. But the man who possesses the *esprit de finesse* (and your inventor is nearly always of this intuitive sort) never loses touch with Nature, is prompted, not by reason alone, but by some impulse welling up from the subconscious depths of our being. These men and women of the world with whom Pascal associated that autumn in Poitou, often lacked the spirit of abstraction, and yet bewildered him, for they seemed to have a way of their own of arriving at the truth :

a sort of mother-wit, quite different to the processes of judgment. M. de Roannez would say: "The 'reason why' comes afterwards! A thing shocks me or delights me; on the spur of the instant, I could not tell you why. And yet my pleasure or my pain is instigated by a movement of reason which I discover only on second thoughts." This impulse in his friend delighted Pascal, who found that here was another wing added to the human mind. With Poetry and Science—to what heights may we not rise on such pinions!

The mathematician perceived that the sphere of abstract thought, where logic and number reign supreme, is but a province of that immeasurable whole where Feeling has its kingdom too. A sudden exhilaration filled him as though the limits of his being had been suddenly enlarged. He took out his tablets and wrote: "There are two sorts of genius: the spirit of geometry and the subtler genius of intimate penetration.

"Those who are accustomed to judge by feeling cannot comprehend the arguments of logic, for they wish to pierce at a glance the very core of a truth, and are not accustomed to separate its initial elements in order to reconstruct them. And those who by habit deduce from principles cannot be convinced by the visions of pure feeling; they still seek a rule, a law, and cannot be contented by a view" (fr. 3).

In this château in Poitou, which was to Pascal as an enchanted fairyland in which all things showed their other side, women, even more than men, seemed to arrive at their conclusions, and often to recognize a truth, by the exercise of some divine and

secret faculty. Logic seldom inspired them. But to reach Reality by a movement of pure intuition is the deep desire of every nature destined to the spiritual life : souls of this sort seek instinctively a direct communication more immediate than speech or thought ; and Pascal began to believe that such existed.

Perhaps he fell in love. . . .

One day, towards the middle of the nineteenth century, the critic and philosopher, Victor Cousin, discovered, in a manuscript collection of Jansenist sermons, an essay entitled *Discours sur les Passions de l'Amour, attribué a M. Pascal.* A second copy, anonymous, was more recently found by M. Gazier in the Bibliothèque Nationale. The *Discours,* when we read it, has something, but not everything, of Pascal's style. It is full of the germs and the dust of the *Pensées.* On every page we note some seed destined, years later, to blossom into immortality. There is still, in the manner of the *Discours,* a hint of the gallantry of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, a lingering echo of the mediæval *amour courtois.* Its theme is the silent, the spiritual adoration of a lover for a lady set in a sphere above his own.

There have been many suppositions as to the real author of the *Discours.* Some have attributed it to M. Mitou, and some to the Chevalier de Méré (and, indeed, there is something of his way of writing in it). Some have supposed it to be Pascal's intimate confession. But there is nothing intimate in the *Discours :* it is, as its name implies, a discourse, an oration ; and, for my part, I believe it to be

the text of one of those lectures for which Pascal was famous, a lecture on the Passions of Love—a lecture on Love by a man who had never loved—delivered to amuse the Duke's familiar circle, and taken down in writing by one person, or more, among the audience. It was, perhaps, an attempt on the part of a geometrician to find his way in the labyrinth of Feeling; it may have been inspired by a desire to contradict or supplement Descartes, whose *Passions de l'Ame* were then in every hand.

"How fortunate is a life that begins in love and ends in ambition! If I could have my choice, that is the life I would choose! . . .

"The first result of Love is to inspire a great respect; we revere that which we adore: and nothing is more just—for what in all the world is so great as the thing we love?

"One may sometimes adore a belovèd object who does not dream of our passion, nor ever tire of so solitary a love, keeping our faithful heart inviolate. But such a love must be twice refined and absolutely pure.

"The greatest souls are not the most prompt to feeling—I speak of a violent love. It needs an inundation of passion to shake them to their foundations and flood them from end to end. But when they once begin to love, such natures love the best.

"When one loves greatly, it is always a fresh experience to see the belovèd person after an absence, even a moment's absence. Something was missing in our heart. And lo! 'twas she! What joy to find her again! And how delicious the immediate cessation of anxiety!"

Such maxims (to which I would add a certain *Pensée* (471), to which I shall again refer) have induced most of Pascal's biographers to imagine him in love; and, probably, with his friend's younger sister, that ardent, excessive, imaginative Charlotte

de Roannez, on whom he exercised so deep an influence. Pascal, as I see him, can never have known a sensual passion (yet when one paints a portrait, who knows what surprise the further profile hides ?), but I accept the legend of Pascal's singular affection for Charlotte de Roannez. She was his young friend's still younger sister, an ardent girl, capable (as we shall see) of some romantic devotedness. And soon she reflected the ideas of Pascal as the brook reflects the moon. Doubtless he loved her, but with a pure and spiritual passion such as some priests have felt for a cherished penitent. He loved her brother too. " I make no difference between you," he says in one of his letters. And yet a man of thirty, though broken in fortunes and in health, though poor, though vowed to science, though pale, and lame, and sometimes racked with pain, does make a difference in his love for a young friend and for that friend's still younger sister. A light, bright creature she was, rather worldly, who discovered her soul in Pascal's words. Arnauld did not like Charlotte de Roannez, thought her inconsistent and inconstant. Her subsequent history shows that she could keep a great affection, untouched by time, till the very hour of death, although her actions might be swayed by circumstance.

" Je ne vous sépare point, vous deux, et je songe sans cesse à l'un et à l'autre," so Pascal was to write a few years later to Mademoiselle de Roannez. With the exception of his sister Jacqueline, she will become the most intimate and the most confidential of his correspondents : the *dame de ses pensées*, as the

mediæval poets sang. But Love, whether observed or experienced, was not Pascal's sole discovery in that enchanted Castle. There was also the mystery of beautiful manners—a sort of Magic, often highly estimated by men of learning (witness Renan and his reverence for this *maîtrise de la vie*). We might draw up a code of gentle breeding from Pascal's *Pensées*. Here are some of the observations that he noted on his tablets :

"Self is abominable (*le moy est haïssable*). Never speak of one's self."

Another day he writes :

"Never repeat what you hear. I consider it a fact that if we all knew what we all say about each other, there would not be left four friends in the whole world."

He makes a great discovery :

"Be willing to take trouble about trifles. Put yourself out! The useless gesture means: What would I not do for you if you really wanted it?"

An excellent maxim runs :

"Claim no precedence upon personal merits. Which of us two shall go first through the door? The cleverest? But I am just as clever as t'other; we shall have to draw swords about it. . . . Say, rather, that he has four lackeys, and I have one. That's clear. Count it on your fingers, and I'm a fool if I contest the point."

Another reflection, after listening to some prosing bore and some facetious fool :

"I hate Sir Oracle, and a buffoon is odious."

In a happier mood he writes :

" The true criterion of wealth is to be able to give without stint."

While thus seeking in the observation of character and conduct some balm for a heart too rudely torn by Jacqueline's retreat and his own spiritual aridity, Pascal acquired the habit of noting on scraps of paper the thoughts and remarks that flitted through his mind :

" I had spent a long while in the study of abstract science, but I wearied of science because of the lack of communication : we cannot share our knowledge. Then I turned to the study of mankind, deeming that those abstract themes are beyond the measure of man ; I forgave my fellows for being ignorant, and thought it was I that had lost my way. But I hoped to find companions in the study of the human heart. Again I was deceived. Even fewer are expert in that science than in geometry. If men knew Man they would not seek another study. And yet, even that is not the real, the veritable goal. Nay, if a man wish to be happy, let him remain in ignorance of his own heart " (fr. 144).

One thing that men can share (so Pascal discovered) is amusement, and the lonely Jansenist, surprised, has written concerning the delights of a diversion, lines that no pleasure-seeker has ever equalled. Sport, play, society can charm away sorrow !

" Do you see yon man who lost his only son a month ago and whose despair has filled you with the deepest sympathy : why is he looking so alert and alive ? He is watching to see which way a driven wild-boar will break through a hedge ! "

But, of all these enchantments, none, to Pascal's thinking, can rival with a game of cards ; the philosopher, the mathematician, found himself

bewitched by the freaks of chance, which set him musing.

Some evening, after an interrupted game at cards, when a player had taken two hands, his adversary playing only one, Pascal had been struck by the difficulty of arranging an equitable division of the stakes. He exchanged on the subject (in July 1654) several letters with the mathematician Carcavy, and with the celebrated Fermat of Toulouse. These themes : the uncertainty of the gain, the necessity of taking a risk, the tremendous profit that may ensue from a trifling initial stake, lingered in his mind, germed there and budded and were to produce, a few years later, surprising results in the *Pensées*.

Pascal, man of the world, man of science, assiduous disciple of Montaigne, appears at this moment to have approached the humanism of the Renaissance: the dignity, the beauty, the richness potential in the life of man appeared to his reason a sufficient motive for existence. To accomplish great and noble deeds, to think high thoughts, to enlarge the boundaries of knowledge, to create in the depths of our nature a perfect image of ideal Wisdom, which (as the pool reflects a star) may adumbrate a divinity : such seemed to him the whole duty of Man. For a moment his standpoint was not very far from that of Descartes. But on this lonely eminence his soul remained unsatisfied.

"When God designs to speak to sinners (he writes a little later in a tract on conversion), His first movement is to raise their soul to a higher plane, whence their nature and surroundings appear in a new perspective."

The view that had charmed him no longer seemed so fair. The novelty had worn off. One brilliant conversation too often merely varies the sallies, subjects, anecdotes that have already fatigued our attention. The violent emotions of play excited Pascal, but neither his health nor his purse could stand them long. He would murmur to himself: Must we play? Must we stake? And if we gain, do we gain immeasurably? And if we lose, do we lose utterly? Is Life a game, and is our salvation the stake? His Puritan convictions were deeper rooted than he had thought. And sometimes at night he would gaze on the vast empty vault of heaven with its circling stars, and the silence of those infinite spaces filled him with fear.

One autumn day in 1654 (one day in October, specifies an eighteenth-century editor of Pascal, Abbé Bossut) Pascal was driven by his friends on a coach and six to the Fête of Neuilly. The bridge across the Seine was a rough wooden structure without a parapet, and as the horses turned on to it the two leaders took fright, swerved, lost their footing, and fell into the river. Fortunately the harness broke, so that the coach remained safe on the bridge. But Pascal had seen the swirling waters, the plunging beasts, had shuddered at the thought of imminent death, and his sensibility had received a permanent impression. A Jansenist tradition runs that henceforth he always saw a deep pit open at his left side; sometimes in the midst of a conversation he would get up and fetch a chair, that he would set beside him to mask the dreadful vision. This

story is perhaps only the illustration of a certain passage in the *Pensées* :

"Nous courons sans souci dans le précipice, après que nous avons mis quelque chose devant nous pour nous empêcher de le voir."

But the contrary also may be true, and the *Pensée* may be founded on Pascal's experience of this terrible hallucination.

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHT IN NOVEMBER

'LE silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie ! "

Silence ! No answer to a suffering heart, mysteriously shed from the sphere-strewn night, no response or reassurance (such as Immanuel Kant will feel in gazing on the eternal order of the stars), no deep exhilaration (such as might uplift Descartes) in watching the worlds in their courses, spinning interminably, each of them made of whirling atoms no less wonderful than they. See, the planets circle slowly in their exact and luminous dance : Jupiter, Sirius, Orion, and the lovely evening star. All silent ! . . . No message from them for the human heart.

Silent and infinite spaces ! Pascal is filled with fear not only because of their eternal silence but because of their infinity. Pascal contemplates the infinite with a mathematician's eye : an inexhaustible movement between indeterminate poles. No end anywhere, no limit, no pause, no rest. Infinite movement ! A sphere with no circumference and a centre that is everywhere at once !

His head reels. How useless and uncertain is that science of Descartes !

"I cannot forgive Descartes! He would like in his philosophy to do without a God. But he was obliged to let a Creator set the scheme of things in motion with a flip of the fingers. And after that Descartes had no further use for God."

Still, in an utter silence of the heart and mind, a listening silence that is almost ecstasy, Pascal waits. No answer!

But this deep yearning, this spiritual aspiration, this endless effort of the Soul to approach its Source?

"When I consider the brief duration of my life, sucked up into eternity on every side; when I look at the point of space which I occupy, lost in the immense infinity of the space that I ignore, I am filled with fear. And I marvel, How came I hither, and why here? not there? . . .

"This strange and secret withdrawal of God, this absence, this retirement, impenetrable to the eye of man, is a great lesson for our littleness, inclining us to solitude, far from our fellows.

"*Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem!*"

Much in this strain (for these thoughts are culled from his papers), Pascal sat musing one late autumnal night. He was alone in his study of the rue Beaubourg, the Duke of Roannez being away in Poitou. He was suffering more than usual. There is a degree of pain which forces us to dive in desperation into our deepest depths, spurning comfort or company, and such was Pascal's mood.

It was Saint-Clement's Day, Monday, November 23rd. In his solitude, Pascal had been reading the Old

Testament. It was half-past ten at night. At last he ceased to read and sat, deep in thought, the closed book on his knees. Perhaps unconsciously his gaze fell upon it. Probably it was bound in one of those brown Jansenist covers, which bear embossed upon their sides the stamped image of a Cross surrounded with broken rays. So I see Pascal. But, indeed, it does not matter. When the Real becomes visible to us by means of a borrowed symbol, it is the Real that imports, and not the symbol.

Suddenly the room was full of fire. In the centre blazed a Cross. Mystical fire, whose beams break from the sacred symbol, as rays do from the sun. The soul of the lonely man was rapt in terror and delight. The God whom he had sought in vain in all the night had deigned to visit him—was mysteriously present. From half-past ten at night until half an hour after midnight that bright unearthly fire bathed his quiet room and filled him with an unutterable sense of ravishment and joy. The remembrance of those hours will ever be Pascal's unfailing talisman against doubt or terror ; they were his holiest secret. Not even Jacqueline heard of the vision. But, after Pascal's death, a strip of parchment, carefully creased and folded, was found, sewn into his coat between the cloth and the lining, covered with hurried and irregular writing in Pascal's difficult hand. More than once, as he changed his suit, Pascal must have sewn into his jacket that sacred memorial of an eternal instant.

Thus runs (translated) the writing on the parchment. At the head there is traced a cross :

" In the year of grace 1654, *on Monday, November 23rd, Feast of St. Clement, Pope and Martyr, and of other saints in the Roman martyrology. Vigil of St. Chrysogonus, Martyr, and others, from about half-past ten at night until half after midnight.*

FIRE

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, and not of philosophers and men of science,

Certainty, Joy, Certainty, Feeling, Vision, Joy.
God of Jesus Christ.
' Deus meum et Deus vestrem.'
' Thy God shall be my God.'

Oblivion of the world and of everything save God.
I have forsaken Him.

He shall be discovered only by those ways that are taught in the Gospel.
Great is the Soul of Man !

' O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee.'
Joy, Joy, Joy, and tears of Joy.
I have fallen away from Him.
' Derelinquerunt me fontem aquæ vivæ.'

My God, wilt Thou forsake me ?
May I never be eternally forsaken !

This is Life eternal, that they may know Thee to be the only God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.
Jesus Christ !
Jesus Christ !

Him I forsook, from Him I fled, Him I denied and crucified.
May He never deny me!

We can keep hold of Him only by those ways which are taught in the Gospel.
Absolute, sweet renunciation.

Utter surrender to Jesus Christ and to my spiritual director.
Eternally in bliss, for an hour's hard training upon earth.
'Non obliviscar sermones tuos.'
Amen."

The night drew on, till in the paling skies without another light arose. And Pascal stood up in the dawn a man renewed, confirmed. He knew Him, now, in whom he had believed.

In that November night, Pascal had discovered a new way from our world of appearances to the ultimate truth we seek: neither reason, nor tradition nor custom, but inspiration: a direct contact with the unseen. It is the path of the Mystics which Pascal more than once will tread, and those who have climbed that steep and dangerous road have a more living faith and a more vivid assurance than other men. Pascal awoke from his vision with a new desire of spiritual perfection. Hitherto he had shrunk from accepting a guide. But now he was determined to tread underfoot that stubborn pride

of the Old Adam which still prevented him from depending on another's will.

"Rénonciation totale et douce.
Soumission totale à Jésus-Christ et à mon directeur."

Jacqueline was not slow to perceive the strange transfiguration of her brother, and she attributed his change of heart to a sermon of M. Singlin's, under whom Pascal had sat on December 8th. (But the good man's discourse came more than a fortnight after the vision.) She wrote to Madame Périer, in Auvergne :

"It is only right and reasonable that you should be told of the workings of God in a person whom we both of us love so much. But I hope he will tell you himself so that you can have no doubts, meanwhile all that I can say in the brief moment that I have at my disposal is that, by God's mercy, he longs to give his heart entirely to the Lord, although he has not yet decided on the form that his future life will take.

"For the last twelve months he has experienced a great contempt for the world, and an almost insupportable aversion for the society of men of fashion, the which—with that fiery temper of his—might easily have brought him to some great excess of zeal. But he has behaved with a wise moderation that fills me with hope. . . . He proposes to submit himself to the direction of M. Singlin, who has not yet answered his request. Should the confessor accept him, I trust that he may show the simple surrender of a child.

"Although my brother seems more ill than he has been for a long time past, he does not let the care of his health turn him from the undertaking he proposes; which shows that his old excuses on that score were just pretexts and nothing more. I notice in him now a surprising humility even in his attitude to me. Well, I have nothing else to say except that it seems clear he is no longer moved by the sole workings of his own natural spirit."

For some reason, Sister Jacqueline de Sainte-Euphémie was sent from Port-Royal-de-Paris to the mother-house in the country—Port-Royal-des-Champs. Thence she wrote to her sister :

"He is oddly anxious that no one should know he comes here, except sometimes to see me. He says he could easily give it out that he has business to attend to in the country ; he could leave his carriage and servants at some village near Port-Royal, and thence proceed on foot, without leaving word in which direction he had gone. And he might give a false name at the door so that no one save M. Singlin would know whom he really was."

That false name—what a Pascalian touch ! Pascal was always a man of freaks and disguises.

In the first week of January 1655 it was decided that Pascal should go into retreat at Port-Royal-des-Champs, "to be quit of the great number of visits that he was in the habit of paying and receiving," visits which are more than ever abundant in France at the New Year. No one knew of his destination except the Duke of Roannez, "son bon amy qui l'occupoit tout entier." It was not without tears that this young lord consented to lose his housemate. Still, on the morrow of the Epiphany, Pascal left Paris with the Duke of Luynes, a notable Jansenist, who drove him down to his country house of Vaumurier, a modest manor within a stone's-throw of Port-Royal-des-Champs. After a short visit to his pious host Pascal intended to seek admittance to the Abbey lands, where he might spend a season of prayer and reflection among the hermits of that holy place. To sleep in a garden house, or at the most a cell, to eat the plainest food with a wooden

spoon from an earthen bowl, what a change from the harmonious luxury of the Hôtel de Roannez! It is characteristic, both of Pascal and of his times, that he set out for this poor hermitage accompanied by Duchesne, his faithful valet. He had not yet learned to serve himself. He was an anchorite with a manservant waiting behind his chair.

CHAPTER VIII

PORT-ROYAL-IN-THE-FIELDS

PORT-ROYAL lies in the greenest of green valleys that ever wound its sinuous length between steeply wooded hills. How tragic it looked, the other day when I saw it, too lush, too dank, too rank, in its sombre verdure, under a stormy Jansenist sky! Scarcely a ruin left to commemorate the Abbey; the flowering rush and the couch-grass springing in tufts about the marshy bottom; remote, almost inaccessible—so low and hidden does it lie from any road—although, as the crow flies, it is not ten miles from Versailles. "As the crow flies!" The valley was full of crows—they rose in companies, crying and flapping their wings, in order to let us visit the last relics of the Saints, and the place of their devastated and polluted tombs.

But it was not thus that Pascal saw it. In the valley (round not that mere chapel but a larger church) rose the old Abbey with its modern cloisters and its outbuildings, protected by eleven towers of defence—brand-new in 1655, for they had been erected by the Duke of Luynes during the recent wars of the Fronde. And where that marshy bottom flowers in flag and rush, spread the celebrated gardens of the Abbey, with their orchards, their famed espaliers—those "Poiriers de pompe et de

plaisirs" which Racine sang, whose fruits the Queen-Mother loved to eat when her old friend M. Arnauld d'Andilly brought them to her, affirming that they, at least, were not Jansenist; those useful kitchen gardens just lightly bordered with flowers (Port-Royal was a little afraid of flowers, thought them probably "snares" and did not admit them to the altar), and all those green things of the earth which testified to the munificence no less than to the skill of their illustrious head gardener, the same M. Arnauld d'Andilly whose name I have just written, a charming old man, cultured, courtly, yet marvellously adroit with the pruning-knife and spade. He was the oldest of all the tribe of Arnauld who peopled Port-Royal—older than his sister, Mother Angélique, the Abbess, or than his other sister, Mother Agnès, and four-and-twenty years older than his youngest brother, "the great Arnauld," the Benjamin and the genius of the family.

All these Arnaulds, fiery, restless, ardent, sincere busy, perhaps a little superficial, filled the valley. M. de Sacy was an Arnauld, and M. Lemaître, and most of those great men. And they were happy in their paradise. But I fancy that, if one were not an Arnauld on the father's or on the mother's side, one might, perhaps, in certain moods find that winding vale a little narrow. True, an eminent historian, M. Ernest Lavisse, has affirmed (near three centuries later) that Port-Royal was one of the few—the very few—places in seventeenth-century France where one could live a really happy life. Still, I remember that Sœur Anne-Eugénie Arnauld called it "une

profonde vallée—une demeure triste et affreuse." Though she added, prettily, " mais le ciel y est plus serein qu'ailleurs ! " This is how it struck that exuberant enthusiast for Port-Royal, Madame de Sévigné :

" Port-Royal is a desert, a deep solitude ; Port-Royal is a paradise. 'Tis a wilderness where the holiest devotees in Christendom have taken refuge. 'Tis an atmosphere of sanctity diffused over all the country round for a league on either hand. There are five or six hermits there, unknown to anybody, who live like the penitents of St. John [the Abbot of Mount Sinai who dwelt so long in a cavern]. The nuns are angels upon earth. . . . All those that serve them, even the carters, shepherds, workmen, have the same modest look. I own that I was enchanted to see this divine solitude of which I had heard so much. 'Tis indeed a valley full of a sacred horror fit to inspire the will to save one's soul."

A " vallon affreux "—thus Port-Royal appeared even to the kindest of its contemporaries.

High on the hill, above the Abbey, stood the considerable farm of Les Granges, which housed the School and some of the Solitaries. Pascal was to find there a narrow cell (it still exists), strictly containing the straitest of beds and a *prie-Dieu*. Round the granges and in the gardens were dotted sundry quaint little lodges, humble shelters where some of the finest minds in Paris had come to seek for God in a poor hermitage. About a hundred paces from the Convent, and still within the Abbey grounds, the Jansenist Duke of Luynes had built himself a modest manor, the Château de Vaumurier.

It was here that Pascal first took up his quarters on January 7, 1655. The Duke of Luynes was himself

a solitary, still sombre and unconsoled for the loss of his " espousèd Saint " who, three years earlier, had died in childbirth. From this most cruel sorrow he had sought a refuge in religion, and a diversion in the philosophy of Descartes, whose *Meditations* he had translated from the original Latin into French. He thus had peopled Port-Royal with Cartesians. For if the great Arnauld had converted the Duke to the doctrines of Saint-Augustine, the Duke had converted Arnauld to the philosophy of Descartes. Pascal found his host's simple manor filled to encumbrance by philosophic Jansenists eagerly discussing the Cartesian theories : the vortices of subtle matter that whirl themselves into being and end as stars ; the " animal spirits," imperceptible to view and touch, that, by circulating in the blood, produce the phenomena of Life ; and asking each other whether dumb animals were merely automatic, part of the universal mechanism which included all Nature, save mankind—for Man was continually in touch with the divine Idea. It was, I imagine, this Cartesian theory of an ever-present Providence which allowed the Port-Royalists to conciliate the philosophy of mechanism with their own chief tenet : that of a miraculous Power suddenly shooting down into men's lives, transforming the Sinner into the Saint by an act of Grace. But here were some who held (with Antoine Menjot) that if the Jansenist Cabal adopted the Cartesian philosophy, it was in order to spite the Jesuits, who could not endure it, " and it is all to the honour of M. Pascal (he adds) that, in spite of his friends, he laughed it to scorn."

There was scarce a solitary at Port-Royal in those days but had his opinion about the automata.

"They beat their dogs without remorse (I quote from the *Memoirs* of Pierre Fontaine) and laughed at those who were sorry for the beasts when they whimpered. 'Mere Clockwork!' they replied, saying that these yelps and cries were the result of a little hidden spring inside the animal, who was no less devoid of feeling. And they nailed the poor dogs on planks by their four feet and opened them alive in order to study the circulation of the blood, which was a great subject of conversation at Port-Royal."

There were, however, dissentient voices. M. de Liancourt (another Jansenist Duke) would tell the tale of his two dogs who turned alternately the spit in his kitchen, day on, day off. The laziest dog would hide sometimes when his time of service came round; but the other dog, incontinent, would snuff him out, and bring him up to the spit, recalcitrant. You call that Clockwork? cried the Duke, with an air that all but added: Clockwork yourselves! But the Cartesians knew that *they*, at least, were not mere machinery because they *thought*: *Cogito, ergo sum*, the Master had defined it.

O sweetness of Saint-Francis! Pascal, I grieve to say, gave in to this conceit of clockwork animals. But he made great fun of the subtle matter and could not endure Descartes's explanation of the creation of the world, which he called "the Novel of Nature"—*le Roman de la Nature*—and he was soon weary of the enthusiasms of Vaumurier, all the more so that he was just emerging from a semi-Cartesian phase: What is so insipid as the worn-out enthusiasm of yesterday? Pascal had no further use

for a geometrical God. "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, and not of philosophers and men of science!" What he sought was the Hand that interposes and stays the sacrifice, the miracle that crowns a hope in defiance of possibility, the ladder of light that reaches the mystery of Heaven. He felt the aching need of an infinite Father: God of Isaac, Jacob, Abraham.

These lonely hermits of Port-Royal were less rapt in perpetual meditation than he had imagined. They were philosophers, they were enthusiasts. Sometimes they would all be taken at once with an epidemic zeal for gardening (and some would forget that they had all things in common, inventing ruses and stolen marches to obtain a larger share of manure from the stables). At other moments masonry was the order of the day; hod on shoulder, pail or trowel in hand, they would all begin laying stones and mixing mortar for the greater glory of the Abbey. Sometimes, when these sudden fancies rose too high, a breath of battle and independence would ruffle the sweet monotony of their days. "Nos solitaires avaient leurs petites passions," writes, in his delightful *Memoirs*, Pierre Fontaine, the Secretary of M. de Sacy.

This last was the Confessor of Port-Royal-des-Champs, the most placid, imperturbable, discreet of men. He soon became Pascal's spiritual director. No two beings could be more unlike than this priest and this penitent. A solid friendship soon united them.

Pierre Fontaine has left us the account of a

contradictory conference which they held that winter at the Abbey, M. de Sacy undertaking to introduce and answer Pascal, who gave (on the uses that a Christian may make of Epictetus and Montaigne) one of those familiar lectures that he loved to deliver in an intimate and intellectual circle. M. de Sacy had never read either Epictetus or Montaigne, and indeed had always supposed they were authors better left on the shelf, but, since Pascal admired them so much, he was perfectly willing to hear about them. He did not share good M. Singlin's tremors in face of their alarming penitent, for, taking his stand on the Bible and on Saint-Augustine (whom he knew almost by heart) M. de Sacy felt that, whatever his opponent might say, he had his answer ready. After all, Epictetus and Montaigne were a change from Descartes, just as Descartes (although, in M. de Sacy's opinion, rather a nuisance in himself) was useful as dislodging the unique authority of Aristotle. So much the better. Someone else will do as much for this Monsieur Descartes.

"The world is a huge, mysterious object" (said M. de Sacy) "which each of us interprets at his will. It means one thing to you, another to me, quite another to M. Descartes; and God? He doubtless looks at it from a different point of view! Do you suppose we have, any of us, seen what God really made? . . . You know that painted clock which serves as a watchmaker's signboard on the bridge of Notre-Dame? The other day, as I passed by, the painted clock was right to the very minute, and I hurried across very fast, not to overtax its resources. It tells the hour exactly, twice in every twenty-four hours. And so it is with our philosophical theories: once in a while, by chance, they are quite true—for a minute."

But M. de Sacy thought he had in his own pocket,

not one, but two chronometers which were always exactly right, so he looked with an indulgent smile at the painted signboards of his neighbours.

Such idle figures were, to his thinking, both Epictetus and Montaigne. But it was astonishing what wonderful lessons, what doctrine, what food for thought, this young Pascal could extract from their divagations : this brilliant, this burning young Pascal ! How ingeniously he spoke ! He took his two philosophers as types of the virtuous unbeliever—that drowning brother, that doomed victim, whom Pascal longed to rescue, comfort, and convince, even as M. de Sacy longed to confirm Pascal in a sound belief and a more modest righteousness.

Epictetus takes his stand on our submission to the Will of God—a point of view worthy of Port-Royal—and in the innate grandeur of the human soul. Epictetus was a man of great mind, yet the sin of the Fallen Angel, pride, brought him to the dust. Still, taken in due proportion, the poison of Epictetus may be tonic still to such as seek their treasure in the trash of this world. He uplifts ; he stimulates. But he is noxious to those arrogant spirits who trust to attain the life everlasting by virtue, wisdom and duty without the aid of Faith.

Montaigne is the antidote to Epictetus ; a poison in himself, his universal doubt destroys all that human reason holds for sure. Nothing resists his dissolving analysis, neither Justice nor Virtue nor Tradition. He casts a wandering glance across the field of knowledge and shows the unstable fragility of our firmest concepts. What is Time ? What is

Space? What is movement? What is Life? *Que sais-je?* And with a lifted eyebrow, silently he destroys the very groundworks of geometry, physics, politics, ethics, social philosophy and jurisprudence. Yet, as a desperate remedy, none is comparable to Montaigne (measured with a drop-glass) for souls that take their stand on Science and feel too sure of their affair. But deadliest poison, he, to the lax or the indolent! So, unbelievers though they be, one and the other may be missionaries of God's word and (added Pascal with deep emphasis), despite their contradictions, which seem as though they should estrange one from religion, more surely than any other, have they led me to seek a safer refuge in Faith!

M. de Sacy and the Solitaries listened spellbound to the ardent lecturer, admiring the power of Grace that could overthrow an intellect so lofty, and fling upon his knees in a confessional a genius who seemed to blend the pride of Epictetus with the scepticism of Montaigne. Yet they looked upon him kindly.

There exists in the Louvre a picture of the Last Supper, by the Jansenist painter, Philippe de Champagne, in which a long tradition recognizes a portrait of Pascal. The disciples are seated at table round their Lord. To them, there enters from without, as though hurrying to the Feast, a young patrician, who is not of their company. There is no place for him! The face is full of pleading sweetness, eloquent, persuasive. The long hair waves round a broad forehead, the full lips are slightly open above a small retreating chin. The large eyes, wide apart, are

languid and full of contemplative love. None of the faces in the painting seems so rich in ardour; yet they are the faces of those that sit at the Master's table, while the onlooker gazes from without.

Such a one was Pascal at Port-Royal, while M. de Sacy listened to his account of Epictetus and Montaigne, and "stared as though he had been brought into a new country to listen to an unknown tongue." And Pascal also marvelled to find so simple and companionable these men—great doctors—whose names he had learned to pronounce with veneration. And we read in his *Pensées*:

"When we imagine Plato and Aristotle we figure them dressed like pedagogues in doctors' robes. But they were men of breeding, who laughed among their friends like others; and when they were pleased to write their *Laws* and their *Politics*, they did it as lightly as they breathed: it was the least serious, the least philosophical, part of their existence; the truest philosophy being just to live, simply and quietly."

And Pascal was happy in the society of these great minds, though still, no doubt, he felt himself to be *at* Port-Royal rather than *of* Port-Royal.

Pascal remained in the valley until the end of the month, when we find Sister Jacqueline de Sainte-Euphémie writing a long account of his visit to Madame Périer in Auvergne.

"He is now in a cell among the other Solitaries at Les Granges and he writes to me that he is happy to see himself lodged as a very Prince of Poverty, in a lonely spot, so that, so far as decency allows, he may practise the life of the poor, according to the rule of Saint-Bernard. He attends every service in Church from Prime to Compline, rises at five o'clock, and feels no inconvenience from it, moreover—as though it were

God's will that he should add the merits of fasting to the merits of vigil—he finds he can no longer digest his supper, so that I think he will have to leave it off at night, and so set at naught all the prescriptions of all the doctors which constantly forbade him to fast or to watch."

Jacqueline exults. Bright, innocent, ironical Jacqueline, often sublime, seldom tender. Yet who should know so well as she the consumptive tendency of her brother, revealed in every trait of his health, his disposition, and even his genius. And it is the month of January, in the dampest woodland retreat. "He can no longer digest his supper!" Fie on the feckless nun!

We learn several things from her letter. For instance, although lodged but a stone's-throw from the Abbey, Pascal communicates by writing with his sister. There was little verbal intercourse between the Solitaries and the ladies of the Convent—which accounts, perhaps, for the extraordinary veneration, the more than chivalrous devotion, which the hermits professed for their hostesses. Antoine Lemaître, the great legist and Latinist, writes to one of these recluses: "Remember poor Brother Antoine, who now again can set his foot to the ground in your service and in that of the daughters of Port-Royal, who are our liege Ladies, our Sovereigns, our Queens!"; and Racine, as a schoolboy at Les Granges (where he must have arrived this very year), praises sweetly the "Living Stars, the Quire of Saints, the breathing shrines of God," which are those cloistered women.

Pascal left their neighbourhood on the eve of

February to return to Paris to put his affairs in order. No one, save his housekeeper, knew where he was lodged, which was in a chamber of Port-Royal-de-Paris. From the depth of his retreat he began anew to exert his influence on his friend the Duc de Roannez. Like Polyeucte in Corneille's play, who would not be saved alone, he cried,

"C'est peu d'aller au Ciel, je vous y veux conduire."

The Duke and his sister must both be persuaded to embrace the religious life. Marguerite Périer tells a story which I transcribe with a regret that the good lady would have failed to understand; yet there are certain social aspects in which Polyeucte, sincere to the bone though he be, may yet take on an ugly likeness to Tartufe, because of his bigotry.

The Dowager Duchess of Roannez had brought up four children, two of whom, daughters, had taken the veil very young, in order to increase the dowry of their brother and their sister, as was frequently the custom in impoverished noble houses—for the Roannez were still suffering from the dissipations of a fashionable grandfather. The Duke and Charlotte were reserved to carry on the name and the grandeur of the family, the one by marrying an heiress, the other by wedding a Duke. Roannez was six-and-twenty—gifted, the heir to a great name, occupied in an office of importance. There was a young lady of whom the Duke had dreamed, a Mademoiselle de Mismes, the greatest heiress of her age, lovely and full of charm. She seemed quite out of reach, until one day, old M. d'Harcourt, the Duke's great-

uncle, arrived at the Hôtel de Roannez and said that the young lady's friends had called on him to propose the match. Great was the joy of the old Duchess and of all the household.

The Duke unaccountably refused. At that time, as indeed, henceforth, till the end, he was absolutely under the influence of Pascal. He said that he had determined to pass his life in single strictness. Yet he was the sole heir to a great name and title. Consternation reigned.

"At last" (writes Marguerite Périer) "all the people in the family began to attribute his conduct to the influence of my uncle, so that they began to abominate M. Pascal, so much so that one day a woman who acted as concierge at the Duke's mansion ran up to my uncle's rooms, a knife in her hand, determined to stab him. Fortunately my uncle was absent, for, contrary to his custom, he had gone out early that morning."

At this date Pascal was certainly a fanatic—even Jacqueline writes to beg him to moderate his zeal.

"People congratulate me on the pious fervour that lifts you so high above the common track; it seems that you consider a broom a mere article of superfluity! If you would show that you can be as perfect in humble diligence and wise direction of your servant, as you are already accomplished in modest neglect of all that touches your own person, you would try, just for a month or two, to be absolutely as clean as now you are the reverse. After which ordeal, if you still think it is to the glory of God that you should exist in a filthy litter, why, do as you please! But I doubt if it be the better way, for Saint-Bernard was not of that opinion.

"*Paupertas semper placuit, sordis nunquam.*"

CHAPTER IX

THE "PROVINCIAL LETTERS"

WHAT were the distinctive tenets of Port-Royal, which made it the butt of so many persecutors?

Antoine Arnauld was wont to say that the disciples of Saint-Augustine, standing midway between the Protestants and the Jesuits, builded their religion upon the Love of God, whereas the Protestants were justified by faith, and the Jesuits by the spirit of obedience.

The Love of God: that is to say, a constant reference to the Eternal. The natural man refers all things to himself. Salvation is that sudden change of heart which makes him refer all things to the Eternal, and so invert that sinful process which lost him Paradise of old, when, having at his command the Love of God, which is infinite, he preferred an apple.

In the Jansenist's eyes, to care for place or power, for name or fame, for ease or wealth, for art or knowledge, was to go on preferring the apple.

But in the sight of onlookers the distinctive mark of Port-Royal was the terrible doctrine of Predestination.

The Jansenist's crucifix has not its arms outspread, but reaching upwards in a desperate imploration:

there is but a narrow space between them. For many shall be called, but few chosen. And those that are chosen are not rescued for their own merit. . . . When Jesus on the Cross, in His Infinite Passion, saw roll before Him all the amplitude of Time (all the souls that ever were or are or shall be) there were some on whom He smiled with love in His agony, and some from whom His gaze was averted. He died to save us all, or rather to accord to all men the bare possibility of salvation. All might be saved. Some were saved. Unborn, they had been saved on Calvary and, with the Dying Thief, accepted for no merit of their own (and even these few at any hour might fall from Grace), while others, for no fault of their own, were foredoomed to perdition, unless the Love of God should intervene.

For every day, by the magical act of Grace, new souls were joined to that remnant of the Elect. The Magdalen, the reprobate, the prodigal, even the righteous Pharisee might feel his inward being overthrown and the needle of his will set to a new point of the compass. There is no meriting Grace, but the Love of God in a heart attracts that divine thunder-storm which inundates all within under the flood of a new felicity.

There are two ways of being happy. Nature proposes : Feeling, Enjoyment (the *libido sentiendi*), or Knowledge (the *libido sciendi*), or Power (the *libido dominandi*), which bids us dominate, reign, survive. But Grace says : Love. "*Ama, et fac quod vis !*"

There are two movements of human activity, two instinctive gestures of the hand : we may grasp or

we may give. The whole effect of Jansenism was to diminish the natural tendency to grasp by increasing the supernatural desire to give.

Charity, Grace. Therein lay the doctrine of Port-Royal ; and its effect was to form a chosen few who, even in this world, should lead the life of eternity, remote from terrestrial cares. There was something of La Trappe in Port-Royal.

The Jesuits were less fastidious ; their comfortable omnibus, with room for all, jolted cordially along the steep and narrow way in an atmosphere of undeniable good will to all men—provided they did not oppose the Society. No difficulty about finding a seat in that roomy vehicle, the only question being : Did it get anywhere ? Did it arrive ? The Jansenists looked on it as bound for perdition.

If a certain spiritual mediocrity, or vulgarity, offended Pascal in these charitable impostors (as he thought them) a more obvious reason for resenting them was their ambition, their love of power, that *libido dominandi* which Saint-Augustine had condemned. The Jesuits did not seek to hide their light in a green and quiet valley. They aspired to rule the world through their pupils and their penitents. The King's confessor was always a Jesuit. In their admirable schools the children of the nobility were educated. They also, on a different level, attempted to form their Elect. Power was their aim. Obedience their virtue. Their enemies accused them of intrigue and ambition, but their active genius sought, through devious ways, the general good. Heroic, chivalrous, cheerful, they were unrivalled as mis-

sionaries to the heathen. Not only in China, Japan, and all the East, the Fathers preached their message ; the Jesuit Missions of Paraguay formed a theocratic state where more than forty thousand Indian families, distributed in some three dozen towns, tilled the soil, heard the Mass, obeyed the Jesuits, and lived in much material prosperity *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. And Paraguay, where the Jesuits ruled unquestioned, was, in their sight, that realized dream which Port-Royal was to the Augustinians, withdrawn from the world and its works.

In all honesty the Jesuits believed the Jansenists to be rank heretics, Calvinists in disguise. The Arnaulds (who were so great a part of Port-Royal) sprang from a Protestant stem. Jansenius's doctrine of Predestination (though less absolute than that of Calvin and mitigated by the activities of Grace, of Prayer, of all the Sacraments) offended the Jesuits by its sublime injustice ; their superficial optimism accepted without question the doctrine of Free-will. They were not savants ; they had not noticed that an apple-tree bears apples and a plum-tree plums. They fancied that by careful gardening any tree might bear any fruit. The Jesuits were Relativists—and there was a great deal of truth, it must be owned, in what they taught, in what they practised, in all they touched, with a sort of cheerful and heroic mediocrity.

On the whole, I think they would have let Port-Royal alone if the Augustinians had been content to translate the Fathers of the Church and to say their prayers. But the Schools, immediately successful,

were a direct infringement of patent. And they threatened the future. Already, too, three Jansenist Dukes : Liancourt, Luynes, and this young Roannez. That, indeed, was poaching on their manor. Port-Royal had become a scandal. It would perhaps be necessary to force these Jansenists out of the Church and send them spinning along the road to Geneva, where they properly belonged.

And yet Port-Royal was passionately Catholic. The Robe of Christ must remain without a seam ! Arnauld, Nicole, Sacy, M. Singlin, M. de Rebours, all the disciples of the Abbey, were true to the Pope, adored the Sacraments, believed the creed of Rome —to which they added certain spice of other doctrines culled in the pages of Saint-Augustine by Jansenius, the late Bishop of Ypres. And straining every nerve in a double loyalty they strove to maintain their place among the sons of Rome and yet to yield no jot of their master's tenets —their master being less Jansenius than Saint-Augustine.

The storm gathered. In 1649, one Nicolas Cornet, Syndic of the Sorbonne, published a sort of abstract of Jansenius's theories reduced to Five Propositions, which, roughly stated, were : 1. That there are men who cannot obey the divine Commandments, because they lack for Grace ; these men, though just, are lost. 2. That Grace is irresistible and commands the will of man. 3. That men are responsible although constrained by predestination. 4. That Christ did not die for all men. 5. That the Elect alone shall be saved. In 1653, Pope Innocent, protesting to the last

that he was no theologian, condemned these Propositions " in their evident natural sense."

The Jansenists never admitted the correctness of the Five Propositions, a mere caricature (so they affirmed) of the beneficent evangel of Saint-Augustine. Were they not the work of an enemy ? Pascal, in his *Provincial Letters*, will declare them " impious and detestable." The Jansenists denied that any one of these Five Propositions could be found in Jansenius's great work, the *Augustinus*. Antoine Arnauld asseverated angrily and loudly that Port-Royal was willing to declare the Five Propositions heretical, for they were an invention of the Sorbonne's. Thereupon the Sorbonne replied by calling all its doctors to the rescue, and putting Arnauld on his trial, first for temerity and misstatement, a sin against fact ; secondly, for heresy, a sin against faith.

Antoine Arnauld was himself a doctor of the Sorbonne. In December 1655 he was arraigned before his peers ; but they tried him in his absence. He had been in hiding since the autumn. Inured to persecution, every good Jansenist had as many *caches* and burrows as the rabbits of the fields. About the New Year, Pascal joined his friend in his mysterious refuge ; Arnauld's nephew, M. de Sacy (who was Pascal's spiritual director), came and went between the fugitives in their hiding-place and the community at Port-Royal. On January 4, 1656, we find the Abbess, Mother Angélique, writing to Arnauld—who was her brother, but nearly twenty years younger than herself : " It was a consolation

to see my dear nephew, Sacy, but what a grief to know you are alone. We must love the Will of God, else how I should deplore the loss of our dear Simon. So long as he lived, I could trust him with my whole heart to take good care of you. They tell me you have Monsieur Pasqual with you. Well, so much the better. But he is only useful in the things of the spirit. For all the rest, I wonder if you have anyone else in view ! You must have someone."

Touching despair of a tender elder sister at finding Mary installed where she would so much have preferred the help of Martha !

But Mother Angélique was soon to see that, in certain cases, Mary is as " useful " as Martha. The days drew on ; the trial proceeded ; the judgment of the Sorbonne was imminent. There were said to be seventy Doctors in theology who would vote for Arnauld ; a hundred and thirty were bestirring themselves to ensure his condemnation. " And if these be not enough," cried the Queen-Mother (a Sorbonnarde) to the Princesse de Guéméné (who was for Arnauld), " why then we will fetch in as many mendicant monks as we require ! " The verdict was certain : it might mean merely a censure. It might mean the Bastille. And, though it would be pronounced in Arnauld's default, it would affect his whole future.

Would no intervening angel stay the sacrifice ? Cardinal Mazarin was indifferent. The young King cared as yet for none of these things. The Queen-Mother was violently hostile. The salons of Paris, which in those days—on the morrow of the Fronde—

were still a great power, were quite unenlightened. Yet an appeal to public opinion was Antoine Arnauld's last hope. He tried to state his case. But he knew too much and would leave nothing out; even the friends from Port-Royal to whom, one day, he read his Apology, found it long and wearisome; when he stopped reading, they bowed their heads in silence. Then Arnauld turned to Pascal, who was sitting by: "You are young: you should try your hand at something!" Twenty days later appeared the first *Provincial Letter*. It was signed: *Louis de Montalte*.

"Are you still Monsieur de Mons?" Jacqueline Pascal had asked, writing to her brother in October of the preceding year. It was the false name which Pascal had given at Port-Royal, or rather it was his incognito. "Pascal de Mons" had been the name of his great-grandmother; he had a right to use it. Montalte, the high mountain, was that Puy-de-Dôme which dominates his native place and which had served for the great experiment.

The letters were written in hiding, printed in secret on clandestine presses: no sort of correction or revision was possible; no work of reference at hand, save Arnauld's inexhaustible knowledge and Arnauld's indefatigable memory. Arnauld supplied the facts, for Pascal was no theologian. Merely he "put his pen at the service of Port-Royal" (as he had offered to do ten years before): his pen, his genius, his life, his fire, his youth, his dancing irony, his delicate laughter; all the grace of those dazzling rapier thrusts of an invisible Ariel.

Pascal was fighting desperately to save a friend ; the spirit of battle soon awoke in him something violent and gay. His one chance, at this eleventh hour, was to show, not only the falsehood, but the absurdity of the Jesuits' accusation. If he could make them appear ridiculous, why, then his friend was saved ! The *Provinciales* are comedies, as Racine pointed out. But underneath the mockery and the indignation there was a firm logical basis, a furious love of truth.

" In my Father's house there are many mansions." Pascal supposes that an artless inquirer, writing to a friend in the provinces, describes his pursuit of theological truth. The so-called Louis de Montalte goes from the Molinists to the Thomists, from the Thomists to the Jesuits, a little disconcerted by the many iridescent shades of a central Truth which shines as bright through a whole spectrum of varying colours. How different they are ! And yet good Catholics, all. Why, the Jansenists are nearer to the Thomists than the Thomists are to the Jesuits ! Why draw so severe a line between Saint-Thomas and Saint-Augustine ?

One day a volume of Jesuit casuistry fell into the hands of Pascal (I think it was the Chevalier de Méré who put it there), and thenceforth a new note breathes in the *Provincial Letters* ; the Ariel-like mockery is now supported by a deep blast of prophetic indignation. If there was anything that Pascal revered, prayed for on his knees, regarded as divine and essential, it was the direct workings of God in an individual soul prompting the decrees of

conscience. And the Jesuits denied the value of this inner voice, substituting for its *νόμιμα ἄγραπτα κἀσφαλῆ θεῶν*, a code of texts, a written law, drawn up by technical experts, applicable to any case, and based on the same sort of reasoning as animates the lists of precedents consulted by jurists in a court of justice. The Casuistry of the Jesuits was far nearer to the Talmud than to the spirit of the Gospel, while Pascal drew all his inspiration from the Sermon on the Mount. In his eyes the Jesuits were Pharisees and something more—corrupters of youth, limbs of the Devil ! For he forgot that the cases mentioned by the Casuists are not commandments or counsels to a soul uncertain how to act ; they *never* refer to the future ; they are a list of extenuating circumstances arranged to enlighten Confessors in the hope of enabling them to bring back into the fold the largest possible number of strayed lambs, however soiled or torn. No sect, no society that ever existed has seriously proposed to corrupt the human conscience ; and Pascal was certainly hasty and unjust in attributing this intention to a Company whose missionary zeal sometimes outstripped its scruples, and who thought it possible to save a soul by the exercise of a purely mechanical piety, an automatic habit which would gradually soften and enlighten all within.

The Jesuits' impersonality, their dominating ambition, their multitude, filled their young aggressor with something very like the horror which some of us felt, during the Great War, for the perfection of German organization : it was the

natural repulsion of the individual conscience from the Spirit of the Hive. And no doubt he was unjust ; he exaggerated the Jesuits' defects, and especially their intentions. But in his most cruel assaults, like some smiling Archangel, he smites with a spear that shines. There is humour—and something not very far from good-humour—in his marvellous portrait of the " Bon Père," so amiable, so accommodating, so mediocre, so utterly devoid of any sort of personal character. All his opinions are taken from some " beau livre de notre Société." " Car je ne dis jamais rien par moi même."

" Il me fit voir dans ses auteurs des choses si infâmes que je n'oserais les rapporter, et dont il aurait eu horreur lui-même (car il est bon homme) sans le respect qu'il a pour ses Pères."

Respect, Obedience, first of all virtues, root of all moral life in the eyes of the Jesuits, they are a form of excellence with which Nature (whatever Grace may do in later days) had but meagrely endowed the fiery soul of Pascal.

The dazzling success of the *Provincial Letters*, which took Paris by storm, disquieted more than one of the recluses of Port-Royal. Was this the Love of God ? Charity and worldly prudence alike demurred. With the Sorbonne waiting to pronounce its anathema, what sense was there in attacking the hidden giant behind the Sorbonne : the Society of Jesus ? We find Mother Angélique writing to the Queen of Poland on March 24th :

" I assure you, Madam, that I am just as impatient as your Majesty with the author of the *Provincial Letters*. He raises terrible enemies against us."

More than thirty years afterwards, Arnauld, in exile, writing to Father Quesnel, recalls the battles of his youth.

"So soon as the Letters began to treat of the Jesuits' morality in that keen and cruel way that cuts like a razor, we heard nothing but complaints and murmurs on all sides from the devout; our pious ladies were the loudest in rebuke. Even our best friends joined in, saying that we lacked Christian charity, and that one should not mix the spice of raillery with holy things. They said, too, that all right-thinking people would be scandalized. They were always at M. Singlin about it, and you cannot imagine how he tormented us. But we stuck to our text and it all turned out for the good of the Church, for never did any pamphlet have such a marvellous effect as those *Provincial Letters*!"

None the less, the Sorbonne in Conclave voted a Censure of Arnauld one week after the appearance of the first *Provinciale*. Since then the mysterious polemists had gained ground. Pascal, still hidden away at the Hôtel du roi David in the rue des Poirées, continued his magical, invisible onslaught. The letters fell from a secret press—three in the month of February. They enchanted the public. Cardinal Mazarin chuckled as he read them. The young King expressed his admiration. But they merely enraged the real adversary. After the Censure, the Solitaries of Port-Royal received orders to disperse, and the schools began to be disbanded. Mother Angélique continues to confide her distress to her royal crony, the Queen of Poland:

"Now all our hermits have had notice to quit. There is only my brother, d'Andilly, and he too must leave; for the Queen, though she does him the honour to like him, will not grant his request to remain among us. All that he could obtain was that

our Gentlemen should not be turned out by the police if they would consent to go quietly, one by one, of their own accord, which has been done. Our valley has been verily a Vale of Tears! The hermits gone. Fifteen of the children are already gone in such grief as you can imagine at being torn from a place they love so well. It was a sad sight. But we must resign ourselves to the Will of God."

So wrote Mère Angélique on March 24th. Yes, on the very March 24th. Remember the date; it is a great one in the history of Port-Royal. The good woman, occupied with her grumbling, did not hear the rustle of wings, nor the voice of that interposing Angel who of old bade Abraham stay the sacrifice—a voice that spoke to the man in hiding, disowned alike by friends and foes, and justified his mission. . . .

"When men will listen no longer to the truth, then Truth may speak immediately to men" (fr. 832).

"Miracles decide when things are doubtful . . . between Jew and pagan, between Jew and Christian, between Catholic and heretic, between reviled and revilers, between the Dying Thief and his fellow" (fr. 841).

CHAPTER X

THE HOLY THORN

"SI Dieu n'a pitié de nous, la maison est perdue!" cried Mother Angélique.

Port-Royal was indeed in process of dissolution. On the very day of the Abbess's mournful letter to the Queen of Poland, a Jesuit Father, calling at Port-Royal-des-Champs, proffered such dreadful threats that old Madame Racine, standing by—"la bonne veuve, Madame Racine"—fell down in a dead faint from sheer emotion. At Port-Royal-de-Paris the upheaval was not less great; day by day the pupils left the convent, first those that lived hard by, then, little by little, those whose parents had to come to fetch them, sometimes from a great way off.

Among these latter were Pascal's little nieces; good Florin Périer on his nag was jogging patiently over moor and mountain to fetch his little girls, of whom one, Marguerite, was in such poor health that it was doubtful whether she could stand so long and so tiring a journey; for some time back the child had been suffering from a gathering in the lachrymal gland, where an abscess or fistula had formed, giving vent to an intolerable discharge, so that the doctors advised a painful operation. This little Marguerite was Pascal's god-daughter.

On this same Friday, March 24th, a neighbour of the Ladies of Port-Royal, a certain M. de la Poterie, a great collector of relics, knowing in what trouble the Abbey was plunged, brought to the pious Sisters, as a consolation, the choicest of his specimens : a small gilt reliquary in the shape of a sun with rays, supposed to contain a fragment from the Crown of Thorns. The nuns placed it in the choir of the church on a small table arranged as an altar. Then, in a slow retinue, they, and the few pupils yet remaining, trooped before the bright memorial, and each of them in turn, falling on her knees, pressed to her lips the jewel that contained (or so at least they thought) a witness of the Saviour's Passion.

It was a moment of intense rapture to all these pious women on the eve of a great uprooting. One of them, Sister Flavie, seeing the sick child approach in her due turn, whispered, " Touch your eye with it, Margot." And, in unquestioning faith, the little girl obeyed. Wonderful is the power of faith . . . contagious and general faith !

The child, being obedient, raised the reliquary to her face, believed with all her soul that Christ would cure her—and then—being a child, ten years old—went away and thought of something else. Toward evening she said, surprised, to one of the sisters : " Why, my bad eye is cured ! It does not hurt any longer." Sister Flavie, overhearing, came up and examined the child's face. All was sound and sweet, the swelling gone, the eye clear and tearless, the cheek fresh and dry.

That evening the nun whose duty it was to tend the sick child came to comb her hair; she was careful not to touch the locks above the left ear. "You may comb wherever you like," laughed Margot. "The pain has gone." Little by little, through the silent convent, whose only conversation was in heaven, the news spread that little Margot Périer had been cured of her fistula by the direct act of God.

We can imagine such a scene in any convent, at any time, and indeed to-day at Lisieux or Lourdes. What is harder to realize is the immense, the immediate effect of the miracle on Port-Royal, on the persecutors of Port-Royal, and especially on Pascal. It was, perhaps, the greatest event of his life. Friends and foes had rebuked him, his lovers had stood afar off. And then the Voice had spoken which of old had uttered: "This is my belovèd Son in whom I am well pleasèd." God had justified him. Those infinite spaces had broken their mysterious silence and a miracle had proved that God does really occupy Himself with the doings of our inconsiderable planet, does intervene in human affairs, does save the innocent in their extremity, distinguishing the faithful from the heretic, the calumniated from the slanderer, and the Dying Thief, accepted despite his sins, from his comrade doomed to the eternal death! The miracle had spoken for Port-Royal! The miracle had spoken for Pascal! A burning gratitude, an immense exultation filled his soul: Christ was his witness! The little girl who had been chosen to show forth the Will of God was the

nearest thing he had in the world, his god-daughter, his sister's child. " God has never made a family more happy (so Pascal was to write in his *Pensées*). May He grant that none shall prove more grateful ! " As a proof of his thankfulness, he changed his father's coat-of-arms (and this must have been a sacrifice to one so rooted in his patrician standing) for a new device : an eye, azure, surrounded by a crown of thorns, with the motto : *Scio cui credidi.* I know Him, now, I *know* Him, in whom I have believed.

It may seem strange that a great experimental philosopher, such as Pascal, should have had no qualms as to the authenticity of the relic : a perishable woody spine mysteriously discovered in the Ile-de-France more than sixteen centuries after the sacrifice on Calvary. I expect he thought that the Holy Thorn was holy chiefly because God had chosen it for an instrument. At any rate, from that day forth it was holy. And the miraculous curing of the wound was a fact attested by credible witnesses, including several physicians and many eminent ecclesiastics. A fact was precious to Pascal, who still was the disciple of Bacon and of Galileo. He was a physicist—and the physicist moves through a torrent of marvels, stepping carefully from fact to fact. If he miss his footing, he falls in the flood and is lost, so he prizes the stepping-stone. The world of the physicist is still, so to speak, in process of creation, not yet irrevocably fixed. What was impossible or supernatural yesterday appears natural to-day. No one is less hard and fast in his reasoning than a physicist, always ready to enlarge his scheme of

things so as to include a new discovered truth. If a physicist be at the same time an ardent believer it is easier for him than for other men to admit what seems to his fellows rank superstition—we have seen that, in our own times, in the case of Professor Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge. It was therefore possible for Pascal to accept the miraculous healing of Margot as proving God's desire to save Port-Royal, just as he accepted the variations of the mercury in the tube as proving the weight of the air. Moreover, this student of Nature referred the very existence of Nature to Something Behind, greater than Nature. And he wrote in his journal (for the *Pensées* are a sort of scattered journal) :

"God has torn aside the Veil of Nature! He that dwelleth in secret has made Himself plain!"

Henceforth the conviction never left him that God was the witness of Port-Royal.

The miracle made a sensational effect, at Court, in town, and, for a time, even among the Jesuits. The Queen-Mother immediately ceased her attacks on Port-Royal. Old Arnauld d'Andilly, her friend, to whom she had refused the right to remain in the valley, was allowed to return to his orchards. The great Arnauld himself was permitted to come and go on visits unauthorized but unpunished. And little by little most of the banished hermits crept home. Meanwhile Cardinal Mazarin expressed a polite interest in the miracle, for he was a Churchman after all, and said he should like to receive further details as to its authentication. As for the clergy, the people,

and especially the sick, the halt, and the maimed, they poured in streams every Friday to the Church of Port-Royal-de-Paris, where at three o'clock a special service was held to exhibit the relic and commemorate the miracle of the Holy Thorn.

The blind, especially, set all their hopes on the mysterious instrument which had cured the fistula of Marguerite Périer. And, in the month of June, Mademoiselle de Roannez, suffering from some slight affection of the eye, determined to try the effect of a novena, and went to Port-Royal-de-Paris accompanied by her mother and by her brother, the Duke. On nine successive Fridays she made her pilgrimage, saw the memorial shining on the altar, and listened to the nuns, who with clear ecstatic voices sang :

"O spina mirabilis!
Malorum solatium."

Was it again the contagion of an epidemic enthusiasm ? That Holy Thorn suddenly pierced her to the heart.

"You know, madam" (she wrote to her great-aunt, twelve months later), "I had never been much occupied with thoughts about religion, and I had never, really, taken much interest in Port-Royal when my mother took me there, to try a novena, a year ago come the first Friday in August. And there it was, madam, that God, by the stroke of Grace, sent me so sudden and irresistible a longing to quit the things of this world, and to pass my life in that cloister, that I would have entered it on the very hour, had I believed they would have received me."

To her mother, the young postulant adds, very prettily :

"It was neither a sermon, nor a discourse, nor a book that touched my heart. I think, dear mamma, that it must have been your prayers: those prayers you sent up for me while I was thinking only of worldly things."

The Dowager Duchess was not to be consoled. Why had they become so intimate with M. Pascal? Charlotte might say what she liked, but he was at the root of it, and, since his conversion, she had lost her peace of mind. Here was her only son threatening to sell the Governorship of Poitou in order to turn hermit; and here was Charlotte determined to be a nun!

The Duke himself did not take his sister's conversion very seriously. He carried her off into Poitou, where they stayed six months, until the month of February 1657. During their absence from Paris, Pascal corresponded continually with his friends, striving to confirm them in their wish to lead the mystical life. Such fragments of these letters as we possess are different from his usual style, less concise, less elliptical, less (if I may say so) dramatic. The meaning is often veiled and obscure; they are full of recondite allusions. For they are in some sort the letters of a fellow-conspirator: should they fall into the old Duchess's hands, she must be mystified, poor lady, rather than enlightened. The first of these missives is full of the wonder and the fervour of the miracle. Surely if ever Charlotte de Roannez came near to touching the deep, untender, masterful heart of Pascal (which was, I believe, impervious to normal human passion), it was when he saw her in the light of a *miraculée*, transpierced by the holy

anguish of the Redeemer's thorn, a lost lamb, saved from the thickets of this world by his own shepherding, and still illuminated by the mysterious beams of Grace!

Nine of these letters have come down to us: they were probably copied from copies in the possession of the Duke of Roannez. The originals were burned in February 1688. So long as she lived, Charlotte de Roannez had kept them by her, inestimable relics, even when, after Pascal's death, she re-entered the world in order to marry the Duc de la Feuillade. These Jansenist letters were an abomination in the sight of that outrageous adulator of Louis-Quatorze; not one of them must survive the dying Duchess. So, propped on her pillows, the exhausted woman asked for a taper, by her husband's orders, and read all the letters once again. "Ah, there is one that would console you!" she would sigh to her waiting-women; yet, one after another, she let her sacred treasures take the flame and flung them, blazing, into the hearth. Meanwhile the Duc de la Feuillade paced to and fro in her chamber. . . . All that is far ahead. Let us glance at the fragments which are published in MM. Brunschvicg and Gazier's fifth and sixth volumes:

Pascal writes:

"Your letter filled me with the deepest joy. I confess that I had begun to fear, or at least to wonder. I do not know what foreboding of grief you would tell me of, but I knew that grief must come. When your letter arrived, I was reading the 13th chapter of St. Mark, and thinking that I would write to you, so I will tell you what I found in it. Therein, Jesus Christ, speaking to His Apostles, tells them what will be the manner of His

Last Coming. And as everything that happens in the Church must also happen in the life of every individual Christian, we may be sure that this chapter foretells, no less than the state of the entire universe, the condition of every soul in which, after a conversion, the old Adam must be destroyed; for that which was old must give place to a new heaven and a new earth, sayeth the Scripture. And so I thought that this prediction of the desecrated Temple's overthrow may figure the ruin of the desecrated human in each of us, of whom it is said that there shall not be left stone upon stone. Terrible civil strife, domestic wars! How well they represent that inmost trouble which all those know who have given themselves to God. It is all true, to the life!

"But this text confounds me: 'When ye shall see abomination in that place where none should be, then flee straightway, and take your flight without going back into your house to seek what ye have left.'" . . .

A man still young and full of passionate activity, but hampered from continual ill-health, with all the disabilities of age; a sufferer, often racked with nervous pain, who never had known the careless joy of youth, it was natural that Pascal should idealize his own life of anguish and renunciation, consider pain a privilege, and "sublimate," as the new phrase goes, neuralgic tortures into a voluntary crucifixion, a participation in the pangs of Calvary. His immolation, his aching beatitude, was a happiness to Pascal. He thought that he carried for an hour the Cross which his Saviour must bear until the end of Time. For Pascal, we consent to this cultus of pain and renunciation, but it seems a cruel Gospel to preach to a girl of twenty—a light, sweet, sudden creature (from all we know of her), a widowed mother's flower, and framed for natural joys, rather than for the martyr's crown. Even as when I learned that Pascal

allowed the beasts and birds to be mere automata, the cry breaks from my heart: O sweetness of Saint-Francis!

The letter to Mademoiselle de Roannez continued to insist that earthly life is merely the material out of which we may construct our eternity, and Pascal's persuasion reiterates its plea, profound, pathetic, sometimes terrible. Over and over again he pierces a virgin heart with the Holy Thorn, and his letters are a true *Initium Dolorum*. He takes up his pen again on September 24th:

"It is true that one never can get free without a pang. One does not feel the bond so long as we follow close on that which hurries us along, but, once we begin to resist or to move in another direction, the ties that bind us stretch and gird, so that we suffer sorely. And these bands are our own body, from which we shall break free only in the hour of death. . . . The weight of our natural desires pulls us down to earth, while the Love of God, when it has touched us, draws us up to heaven, and the conflict of these contrary attractions produces a violence which One alone can help us to surmount. Look for no peace on earth! Christ came to bring a sword and not our peace."

Yet, on another page (while warning his friends against that vain hankering after earthly joys forsworn, that habit of looking back, which may make, even of religious men and women, "the Devil's penitents"), he allows them at last to hope for a peace that is not of this world:

"Never believe that piety consists in a bitterness devoid of consolation. Our holiness on earth is never perfect, and yet it may be full of an intimate consolation—step by step we advance towards our crown. The Love of God is a shining light that sheds a glory upon everything it touches, and if there is some melancholy mixed with it at first, it is but the heart of flesh that aches, and not the heart renewed."

Strange words with which to lure a young girl from a happy home! Their magic lay in their sincerity. Pascal believed that happiness is rooted, not in anything that this world can afford, but in the Love of God, and in the purest, the most mystical detachment. His words welled from the heart—hence their enchantment. He thought he held so good a thing that he would share it with his friends, Roannez, Charlotte, Domat.

So in July 1657, a few months after her return to Paris, Mademoiselle de Roannez escaped from her mother's house, and fled for refuge to the Convent of Port-Royal, where M. Singlin and Mother Angélique received her with open arms. She at once began her novitiate, taking the beautiful name of Sister Charlotte of the Passion. " I was there," writes Marguerite Périer in her account of these events, " and I am a witness to her zeal." In vain the old Duchess besieged the gates of the nunnery, begging that her daughter should be restored to her. She obtained no redress. How could she ? All Port-Royal believed that God had snatched a brand from the burning, had led the lost sheep to the fold. At last, after long months had passed, the Duchess appealed directly to the Queen-Mother, who understood her grief, and granted her Sealed Orders—a *lettre de cachet*—enjoining the surrender to her own family of Mademoiselle de Roannez. When she was forced to quit her chosen shelter, sorely against her will, the young postulant convoked all the nuns of the convent into church, and before them all renewed her solemn vows, cut off the long tresses of her hair, and laid them as an

offering before the altar. For six years she lived, under her mother's roof, as severely as Jacqueline Pascal had lived in Clermont.

And then—in the year following Pascal's death—constrained by her family, she married the most sedulous courtier at Versailles, her brother having settled on her the greater part of his estates, with his title to the Duchy of Roannez.

Antoine Arnauld had seen clear : she was a light, inconstant creature—like most other women, and like most other men.

CHAPTER XI

THE LAST "PROVINCIAL LETTERS"

A NEW spirit breathes in the last *Provincial Letters*—a spirit of distant, remote reconciliation envisaged as possible on the other side of victory. Pascal, the fighter, still lays about him on all sides, full of fire and wit, ever ready to refute a Jesuit. But sometimes his mind is suddenly drawn up into a sphere of light and peace, infinitely high above the smoke and dust of the battle-field, whence the barriers and boundaries of earth appear as things dwarfed to insignificance. In will, in heart, with might and main, Pascal is still the knight-errant of Jansenism. But there are moods in which he perceives that ultimate Truth which reconciles all contraries. (Did he ever then remember Brother Saint-Ange ?)

Pascal's intelligence was of that sort which is never long stationary at any given point. His ideas would develop and carry him on with them in a perpetual pilgrimage. Moreover, at that moment, and for a little while (till its course was checked) the whole of Port-Royal, like some great star on its orbit, was slowly displacing itself in the direction of Thomism. Pascal began sometimes to feel that Life held other tasks in store for him than an eternal guerilla warfare with the Society of Jesus. The Holy

Thorn had given his enemies their answer! And now the time had come to leave alone dissension, and to undertake that evangel to the atheist, the free-thinker, the callous believer which should bring them home, even as he had brought the Duc de Roannez and his sister. Pascal was heartily sick of the Five Propositions and all the noise that was made about them. Let there be peace! In the last *Provincial Letters* he has brushed away his fiction of a friend in the provinces. Louis de Montalte addresses directly the champion of the Jesuits, Father Annat.

"What violence in your proceedings, Father!" he exclaims. "I told you once before and now I tell you again: Violence and Verity have no hold on each other; they never come to grips. . . . And all these accusations for an affair of no importance, really of no importance, all this ado about nothing, *pro nihilo*, my Father, as Saint-Bernard would say! One would think the Catholic faith depended on this narrow point of fact: whether or no the Five Propositions are contained in the writings of Jansenius!"

"Put the things at the worst: suppose that the Five Propositions *are* in Jansenius. What could it matter though a handful of persons thought they were not, since these persons detest and repudiate the substance of the propositions just as much as you do? What possible interest or satisfaction have the State, the Pope, the Bishops, the Doctors and all the Church in the blackening of a Doctor and a Bishop who died with all the sacraments? . . . Leave the Church in peace, Father, and I will leave you in peace, gladly enough. . . .

"Believe, however, that authority can never change a fact. If the Propositions are not in Jansenius, no Pope can put them there. The good faith of a Pope may be taken by surprise. The Pontiff and his predecessor, Innocent X, examined the propositions, and found them heretical. Good; but they did not examine whether they exist in the works of Jansenius. That is a point not of faith, but of fact . . . and a fact is a fact. . . .

"It was in vain, Father, that you obtained against Galileo

that Decree of the Court of Rome, condemning his opinion concerning the movement of the earth. If the earth goes round, why, round it goes ! A pontifical decree will never stop its movement. If constant and repeated observation should ultimately prove that round it goes, all the men now alive upon its surface will not prevent the earth from turning, and they with it ! . . . After Pope Zachariah had excommunicated Saint-Virgil, for saying there were human beings alive at the antipodes, do you think the King of Spain was right or wrong, when he listened to Christopher Columbus, who had been there, and not to the opinion of a Pope who had stayed at home ? And which of the two, Columbus or the Pope, really benefited the Church in the end, and brought the Gospel home to all those heathen who would have perished in their infidelity if the King had listened to the decrees of Rome ? " . . .

To bring the Gospel home, ah, that was the great affair ! How could these theologians get so angry over trifles ! The pen dropped wearily from Pascal's hands—Arnauld and Nicole more than once had picked it up, of late, to conclude an argument or supply a reference ; but the nineteenth *Provinciale* remains unfinished. It is the usual destiny of Pascal's work : the *Treatise Concerning a Void,* the *Provinciales,* the *Pensées*—magnificent fragments, all of them.

Reading Montaigne, reading Raymond Sebonda, reading Descartes, reading Epictetus, Pascal begins to muse over his Apology for Christianity. What else matters save Christ Jesus and eternal life ? Are not all those things nothingness which must one day relapse into nothingness : heaven and earth, mind and body, relations and friends, enemies even ; all we possess and all we go without ; honour and ignominy, esteem, contempt, health, sickness, life itself—what are they more than the flies that buzz on

the window-pane ? All alike are perishable trifles in the sight of one who has set his soul on eternal felicity and who already is rapt in the peace of God !

Yet sometimes this exalted dreamer would suddenly subside into the fierce and fiery polemist we knew of old—fierce to his foes, and scarce less fiery to his friends. One day he turned rapidly on M. Singlin, and told this old saint (who had been Pascal's confessor) that he was no theologian and would be wise not to meddle in matters that he could only mar. " I was surprised," wrote an onlooker, " to see how gently M. Singlin took this rebuke from a man so much the younger, and his penitent, to boot." But M. Singlin was indulgent to an invalid's exasperated nerves. More than once Pascal's friends, his fellows, his admired teachers of Port-Royal, made him nigh desperate by their pettifogging fussiness about things of slight importance, and their sudden collapse of energy when resistance seemed inevitable. Their attachment to the valley made cowards of them all !

In March 1657 a Formulary was presented to members of the clergy, including the Religious Orders, which they all were expected to sign ; it condemned as heretical the Five Propositions " contained in the *Augustinus* of Jansenius," and the obedient cleric was required to add these words : " I aver that Jansenius's doctrine is not that of Saint-Augustine and that he has misinterpreted the true meaning of the saint."

This utter and absolute condemnation by Pope and Church had a different effect on Pascal and on

Port-Royal. It was one thing to daunt the Jesuits ; quite another to disobey the Pope. Arnauld and Nicole themselves were for submission, for silence. But Pascal could not tolerate injustice ; he wished to continue the Holy War ; he was still at heart a knight-errant, a free lance, and not the member of a community, trembling for a general peril, seeing it menaced in its existence. " Je ne suis pas de Port-Royal," he had cried in the *Provinciales*, and now, indeed, he felt that he was not of Port-Royal.

The Convent in the Valley knew that it might pass, like Naboth's vineyard, into the hands of the oppressor ; at the very least the schools might be dissolved, the Solitaries dispersed, the very nuns, perhaps, drafted and drifted into distant convents, and the Abbey left a ruin, standing alone in a wilderness. The members of Port-Royal inclined, therefore, to lie low, say little, sign, perhaps, and let the storm blow over. But Pascal (who had been so near a reconciliation when it was he that proposed it) was incapable of yielding to injustice triumphant. His wrath breaks from many a passage in his writings. This one, at the close of the last *Provinciale* :

" The patience of Port-Royal surprises me, and I fear there is some excess in so pious a submission."

Often he is more vehement in those private notes which we call his *Pensées* :

" If they stand dumb, the very stones will speak !

" To keep silence by force is the most cruel persecution ; the Saints were never mute !

" After Rome has spoken, after Rome has condemned the

truth (as we think, unjustly), after our books which contest that verdict have been censured, we ought to continue to cry out louder still. Because the censure is unmerited; because violent men strive to thrust our words back into our throats; we ought to cry until our clamours reach the ears of the Pope at Rome, so that he may hear our side also, and give a just decision.

"The Inquisition and the Society of Jesus are the two scourges of the Truth.

"If my letters are condemned at Rome, that which I condemn therein is condemned by Heaven.

"There are thirty thousand against me, but I have the truth on my side: we shall see who wins the day!"

But Port-Royal would not be persuaded. "I fear nothing," writes Pascal in his notes. "Port-Royal is afraid." And the prudent silence of the Solitaries rankled the more in Pascal's fevered soul that he thought it sprang, not wholly from a pious spiritual obedience, but from a carnal love of the tranquil valley, the beautiful Abbey, its gardens and its schools. He could not close his lips so firmly but that the word "Laxity!" would sometimes escape them: "I scarcely understand how they *can* keep silence!" he murmurs more than once. And a certain change began to steal over his devotion to those great men, his chosen spiritual masters, Nicole and Arnauld.

On September 6th the Holy Inquisition had placed the *Provincial Letters* on the Index. The news reached Paris in the month of October, and, before Christmas, printed broadsheets, containing the Roman decrees, were cried and sold in the streets of Paris. Pascal, in a mood of impassioned protest which none the less implied an infinite confidence in the Unseen—

Pascal then wrote on his notes the word he must not cry aloud :

" Ad tuum tribunal, Jesu, appello ! "

It is a spirit into which we all can enter who have witnessed, in some evil hour, the triumph of injustice : it is the instinctive cry of Antigone no less than of Saint-Paul, the last appeal from the human Code to the *ἄγραπτα κἀσφαλῆ θεῶν νόμιμα*, the safe, unwritten laws of God.

CHAPTER XII

THE TURN OF A WHEEL

DESPITE his mystical absorption in the things of the spirit, Pascal had not entirely broken with the world nor with his old scientific interests; he visited certain salons (that of Madame de Sablé, for instance), he stayed sometimes with the Duc de Roannez, and corresponded pretty regularly with several mathematicians. So Mylon writes to Huygens in March 1657:

"Though it is very difficult to come into contact with M. Pascal, because he lives a most retired existence entirely given up to religion, yet he has not quite lost sight of mathematics; and, when M. de Carcavy happens to meet him, should he propose some mathematical problem, M. Pascal does not object to solve it, especially if it happens to bear on games of chance, which he was the first to suggest as an object for study."

Sometimes, in an idle hour, the spars and flotsam of his self-wrecked work would pass, drifting, by him, and the problems of mathematics while away some moments of a sleepless night—those sleepless nights which were now his accustomed portion.

Fasting, vigil ("pour braver toutes les règles de la médicine qui lui ont tant défendu l'un et l'autre"), the discipline and macerations of the spiritual combat, with that other combat, too, against the enemies of Port-Royal, all these had wasted in a little while

the slender store of health that Pascal had slowly regained by rest and relaxation. All his old miseries returned, accompanied by a *tic douloureux*, a form of facial neuralgia especially cruel. His nerves were all on edge, the least disturbance set him in a fever ; and one day he writes in his notes :

"Look at yon lord of the universe : he cannot follow the train of his thoughts ! And why, prithee ? Because a fly is buzzing in the room."

One evening, the Duc de Roannez, bidding him good-night, left his guest a prey to the most violent toothache. The sufferer sought his bed, only to find, as he laid his head on his pillow, that the pain grew quickly even more intolerable. In order to divert his mind from his physical misery he determined to concentrate his thoughts on some especially tough and difficult subject, so he took for his theme that problem of the Cycloid or Roulette which had long been the despair of all geometers. Both Torricelli and Roberval had tried their skill at it, and neither had been able to find the true solution. I shall not attempt to describe this problem of the cycloid, because I do not in the least understand it, having a mind hitherto virgin of mathematics, and now too old to learn ; but I gather from Lord St. Cyres's excellent and compendious work on Pascal that it is the curve described by a nail set in the circumference of a rolling wheel. What were its centres of gravity ?—the surface and volume generated by its revolution about the tangent at its vortex ? Pascal, in that night of exquisite pain, not only answered these questions but pushed his researches so much farther that later

inquirers had but to pursue the path to come on the discovery of the infinitesimal calculus. For one day, early in the succeeding century, Leibnitz chanced to pick up Pascal's treatise. "Suddenly I saw light!" he exclaimed. "*Subito lucem hausi.*" Newton reached the goal almost at the same moment as the Saxon philosopher. Pascal had set their feet on the right road.

But let us return to our story of Pascal's insomnia: "How have you passed the night?" asked the Duke anxiously as, early in the morning, he entered his friend's room. "How is the pain in your face?"

"Faith!" exclaimed Pascal. "I had clean forgotten it! It is cured!"

"Cured!" cried the Duke, "and pray what cured it?"

Pascal then explained to his friend, who was, as we know, an excellent mathematician, that he had solved the problem of the cycloid. The Duke was greatly excited and interested by this discovery, and asked his guest what use he meant to make of it.

"None!" answered Pascal, "it was but the cure for a bad night," for he mistrusted his own passionate interest in science, and if he allowed himself at rare intervals to sip at the forbidden cup, by way of a sleeping-draught, he dared not satisfy his thirst. And here let me interrupt my tale once more to quote the recent phrase of a young poet: "the devil (says M. Coctean), finding he could not vanquish Pascal by pain, had tried this other task as a subtler temptation":

"Le Diable dicta à Pascal l'invention de la roulette; on reconnait dans cette histoire le rhythme accéleré du Malin."

The Duc de Roannez, however, was not of this opinion. As a geometer, he appreciated the importance of the step taken, while, as a Port-Royalist, he wished to publish abroad a proof of the science of the Augustinians. He advised Pascal to set down in writing, while they still were fresh in his mind, all the details of his demonstration:

"It is unimaginable with what rapidity [I quote Gilberte Périer] my brother then wrote out his theory of the Roulette, his hand tearing along as though it could scarce keep pace with the thought. In a few days the work was finished; he made no fair copy, but sent the sheets to the printer as they fell from his pen."

Having thus prepared his discovery, he continued to ponder his demonstration during several months, and then launched a general challenge to all the geometers of Europe, not under his own name, but masked by the pseudonym Amos Dettonville, which is an anagram of the name by which he had signed the *Provincial Letters*: Louis de Montalte.

He invited all and sundry to describe the properties of the Cycloid, in a set of six answers to the problems he proposed. Their answers must be sent in by a date, which he fixed some eighteen months ahead. They would be judged in Paris by a jury of savants, headed by Carcavy, who, in the last resort, would play umpire. A prize of sixty pistoles (say £30, intrinsic, but with a far higher purchasing power) would be awarded to the victor. Should no one succeed in answering all the six questions, then

Amos Dettonville would produce his own solution and pocket the prize.

On all sides competitors began to show signs of life. One of them, with whom Pascal—Dettonville—has some correspondence, excited in him a warm, admiring interest, for, though he attempted to answer only one of the six questions, his solution revealed the most beautiful exactitude and purity of intellect. This was a Junior Fellow of Oxford, a young Mr. Christopher Wren. Another Englishman, John Wallis, showed himself in a less amiable light, sending in sheaves of "approximate solutions," and resenting Pascal's snub that "there was no such thing." Then there was a Jesuit of Toulouse, a Father La Louère, a gifted amateur of the sort that Pascal especially hated, all muddle, haziness and happy thoughts. Such men set Pascal beside himself and awoke in his mind that vein of ferocity which of old had hounded down Brother Saint-Ange. Among many flowers of courtesy, biting words were exchanged, the more piquant for the quaint dog-Latin in which they were composed (for Latin still was the Volapük of Science). And the first result of the competition seems to have been that Pascal made himself two solid enemies, Wallis and La Louère.

Neither was satisfied when Carcavy declared the match a drawn game and gave the purse of pistoles back to Amos Dettonville. Wallis complained to Huygens that he considered the whole thing a farce, or a fraud ; at the very least it was a way of putting side on ("ad pompam facere visum est"), a manner

of advertising Dettonville's own discovery; and as for Dettonville, Wallis had his shrewd suspicions as to that fellow's real identity: "Si autem, quod suspicor, Pascalius sit." There could be no further doubt on this point when Pascal produced his admirable *Histoire de la Roulette*. Who could unite such liberty to such grandeur? So dazzling a genius to such simplicity? Such a grasp of the subject to such mordant brevity? Obviously Dettonville was Pascal: none other.

There is one thing in this invention of Pascal's which a person who is no geometer may partly understand, and which casts an unexpected gleam upon a whole category of the *Pensées*. Pascal supposes that there are different Orders of Infinity, of which the lesser ones are as naught compared to the greater: What is a point compared to a line? And he attempts a system of intervaluing their incommensurabilities as, soon afterwards, he will compare the incompatible Orders of the Spirit:

> "The infinite distance that separates the magnificence of this world and the grandeur of the mind; and the infinitely more infinite distance which separates Genius from Charity, for that is supernatural" (fr. 793).

When the noise and quarrelling excited by the competition for the Cycloid had at last died down, Pascal felt that—if his discovery had opened out new possibilities to Science—it had retarded his own progress along the steep and narrow way, while the strain and fret of the fray had been injurious to his health. Carcavy writes of him as reduced to a state

of utter lassitude, and Ismaël Boulliau informs Prince Leopold dei Medici that he is in a decline :

" Geometra illa Dettonvilla, cujus proprium nomen est Paschalis, in tabem lapsus est.

" Fallen into a decline on account of the activity of his mind. His vital spirits appear suddenly exhausted. He can only take a little broth or draughts of asses' milk, on account of the intemperance of his bowels and his brain ; but it is to be hoped that by care and diet he may yet be cured."

In March 1659 the same Ismaël Boulliau informs Huygens that M. Pascal is " sequestered somewhere, I know not where, in a Jansenist phalanstery."

All through June and July he was very grievously ill ; in August, a little better, and then allowed to move into the country, probably to Port-Royal or Vaumurier. The tubercular diathesis from which he had suffered since his infancy, and which had been masked, even from medical observers, by his nervous fragility and his rheumatic habit of body, was again firmly centred in his entrails, and will not again relax its unrelenting clutch.

CHAPTER XIII

PASCAL'S GETHSEMANE

PASCAL lay for two months at death's door, incapable of argument or reason, racked with pain. Holding that we are here on earth to climb out of the animal to the intellectual order—and from that plane to advance, by a more dangerous leap, to the world of the spirit—Pascal had missed his footing ere he took his bound, and had fallen into that precipice which the vain cobwebs of science had hidden from his sight. There he lay in the pit, a relapse, a backslider, unable in his misery to think, even far less to pray.

What did the curve of the cycloid matter to him now? His mind could not conceive it. For a little vainglory he had lost his spiritual progress, and now he saw himself beggared, at death's door. Geometry would not help him. To all such vanities he now must bid farewell, as a man setting sail for the Antipodes takes leave of the friends, the sites, the flowers and birds, he will never see again, since they are foreign to that unknown country. His one hope lies in the intensity of his physical pain. There must be life in him yet, since he has such strength to suffer! So, in his solitude, dying, he lifts up his heart to the worshipped Cause of all his pangs, and offers thanks for them:

"O God, that leavest the hardened heart still to enjoy the criminal, delicious pleasures of the world; O God, who now sendest death upon my body, and who in the last hour wilt snatch my soul from all I cling to, from all I loved on earth, from all things on which I had set my heart; I praise Thee, O God, for this Thy mercy, that Thou hast left me unable to enjoy the comfort of health and the world's delight, for Thou hast blasted into nothingness those vain idols which enchanted me! . . .

"Lord, in the hour of death, I shall find myself alone and separate from mankind, naked of all consolation, face to face with Thee; and Thou wilt search all the movements of my heart; then, Lord, let my sickness be a sort of death forestalled." . . .

So Pascal invoked the hidden God who laughs at human reason, yet sometimes, in a sudden flood, reveals Himself, warmly upwelling from the depth of a broken heart. The sick man's past rose before him, and he was soon appalled to find himself still attached so firmly to a world he must quit.

"O God, how happy is the heart that loveth none but Thee! Loving the world, I feel that I incur Thy wrath, and yet I love the world. . . . Lord, the passed years have been soiled by no great crime, for Thou hast led me into few temptations; yet have I merited Thine anger by my long neglect." . . .

What should he allege as the profit of his existence: his experiments in physics or geometry? How vain such trifles seem in the sight of a dying fanatic! What was science to a soul about to exchange the figure of this world for one whose substance and proportion he could not imagine? He had staked his all on experience: it had been his only guide. But who has experienced dissolution?

Perhaps his Crusade against the Jesuits may stand him in good stead? He had fought for sincerity, piety, good faith. But Pascal's deepest belief is that the Supreme Truth conciliates all contraries, makes

a harmony of discords. " In Jesus Christ all contradictions are reconciled " ; in Jesus Christ, Pascal and the Jesuits are one. That which is false, according to the letter, may be true, none the less, according to the spirit.

No, his sole, his only pain remains to pay the price ! By pain at least he can participate in the pangs of Him that hanged upon a Cross on Calvary :

" All that I am is hateful to my God, and I find nothing that may serve as mine offering. Nothing, O Lord, nothing save these cruel throes which bear some resemblance, O my Saviour, to Thine own, when Thou didst hang for me upon a Cross. . . . O God, who lovedst so the painful bodies of mankind that Thou didst choose for Thine own part the most afflicted flesh that ever breathed, accept my wretched frame, not for itself, but for the torments I endure ; love Thou my pain ! And may my suffering invite Thee to visit me. . . . Enter into my heart and into my soul, O Christ, so that in mine anguish Thou mayst undergo the remainder of Thy passion ! Let me no longer live and suffer in myself ! Come, O Lord Jesus, live and suffer Thou in me ! " (*Prière pour demander à Dieu le bon usage des maladies*, ed. Brunschvicg, t. ix).

Gradually the fever and the pain diminished and Pascal knew that he was spared a little span of life. In August he began a difficult convalescence. He went into the country, and it was then, I think, that, in a mood of rapt religious peace, he wrote that meditation on the *Mystery of Jesus* which is one of the most beautiful of contemplative orisons.

The god of Descartes, the geometer's god, could never have satisfied the passionate heart of Pascal : his faith was the tender and ardent adoration of an invisible, an immortal Person. How did he come to set these musings down in writing ? It was the custom of Port-Royal to send to its adherents a

monthly billet of some subject for pious meditation—and Pascal liked to think pen in hand. We know from the *Memoir* of Gilberte Périer that when he received these monthly slips—often no more than a text of scripture, the name of a Saint, or a reflection from the Fathers—" il les recevait avec un respect admirable." Perhaps when he read on his note the word " Gethsemane," he remembered that " Mystère de la mort de Jésus " which Jacqueline had composed at Clermont, and which Port-Royal had found so beautiful ; and his soul may have thrilled to find his feet set in the footprints of that beloved and venerated sister.

Let us imagine Pascal one sleepless night, in pain, forlorn (as one never is forlorn by daylight), abandoned by God and by his dearest (" particolarmente de los amigos," writes John of the Cross)—a mood familiar, surely, to every mystic, and to most nervous invalids. And then his thoughts turn to his monthly billet and he thinks of Jesus in Gethsemane.

" Jesus suffers in His Passion the torments that men inflict upon Him ; but in His agony in the garden He endures a self-inflicted pang. No human hand, but One all-powerful, gave a wound, which no human patience could endure, but God alone.

" Jesus seeks some consolation, at least from His three dearest friends ; and lo ! they are asleep ! Will they not watch beside Him for an hour ? But they, neglectful, have no pity upon Him, and leave their Lord to face alone the wrath of God. None shares His agony, none feels His pain. He and Heaven in its wrath are left alone, face to face. . . .

" . . . Jesus is in a garden. But it is not the garden of delights where the first Adam lost himself and all the human race. This garden is a place of torment, where Christ shall save Himself and all the human race.

" And He endures this agony, forsaken, in the horror of the night."

So far, no doubt, musing upon Gethsemane, Pascal had poured on his Redeemer's feet, like a very precious ointment, the treasure of his pain and loneliness. Gradually the note grows deeper, and swells higher :

" This is the only time, I think, that Jesus asked for pity. But then He complained as though He could not stem the violence of His grief :

" ' Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem ! '

" And His disciples were asleep.

" Jesus will wake in agony until the world shall end ; during that time we must not sleep."

Every mystic feels his pain to be, like his Saviour's, a universal expiation. Pascal also prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, alone, forsaken, through the horror of the night ; Pascal, also, is raised upon a cross and offers his suffering to save the human race. And here we note that he has clearly said : " Jesus shall save Himself and *all* the human race." Would Arnauld, would Nicole, have subscribed to that clause ? Pascal, in his anguish, sees further than they. So it will ever be with him : his friends call on him to defend their views, but his clear sight soon pierces beyond their range of vision. So it will be again. . . .

Hark, in the stifling darkness, a voice is heard that breathes from the Cross :

" Comfort thee ! Comfort thee ! Thou wouldst not have sought Me, hadst thou not already found Me !

" I thought on thee in Mine agony. Lo, of the blood I shed, some drops were spilt for thee !

" Peace to thy scruples ! When the just hour shall strike, then, in thy soul, My Will shall accomplish its work.

" Follow My rule! Lie in My hand, as did the Virgin and the Saints, whom I brought home.

" Trust Me; fear nothing: It is I, not thou, who shall change thy heart! Pray, trust, be confident! . . . Although thy doctors shall not heal thy body (for thou must die), yet will I heal thy soul, and give thee in exchange a body incorruptible.

" I am thy Friend. I am more thy Friend than this one is or that one. Would they have suffered for thee all I endured? Would they lay down their life for thy salvation? Yet, couldst thou count thy sins, thou wouldst lose heart! " . . .

—" Ah, Lord, I have lost heart! I have lost heart indeed! And I believe in mine iniquity! "

" Nay, I can heal thee! This shalt be the sign: thy sufferings pay the price. Pain is expiation. Suffer patiently, so shalt thou feel and know the remission of thy sins. Repent also for thine unknown offences, and for a secret venom unguessed, even in those faults for which thou art contrite."

—" Lord, I am wholly Thine. I give Thee all."

" Know that I love thee far more ardently than thou hast loved the stains of earth! Mine by the glory, not thine, worm of the dust! "

Pascal is again alone upon his fevered sick-bed, but happy, as he turns his signet-ring and murmurs *Scio cui credidi.*

At a certain height all religions reach the same sphere of white illumination ; so, as I muse on Pascal and his invisible consoler, I think of the dying Hippolytus and that divine, unseen yet ever-present goddess whom he had loved during all his youth, " hearing her voice, whose face was never shown." Nor can the staunchest Churchman, I imagine, grudge me the pleasure I find in this foreshadowing, for how could Hippolytus adore Jesus of Nazareth so many centuries before the earliest Christmas ? In those dim Pagan days, a pure heart torn by the thorny contact of the world could still,

it seems, experience its sole, best solace in the society of an invisible companion.

Slowly, very slowly, Pascal advanced towards convalescence. By April 1660 he was able to set out for his native mountains of Auvergne, choosing the water route, so far as it would serve, though it was so long, for canals and rivers were less tiring to a sick man than seven days in a carriage over country roads, seldom mended.

He spent the summer in that commodious house of Bienassis which the Périers had built for themselves just outside Clermont, and there he exchanged some letters with Fermat of Toulouse, which show that, despite the freaks and vivacities of his quick temper, Pascal was infinitely lovable, and beloved.

Here is Fermat's invitation to the invalid.

TOULOUSE,
July 25, 1660.

SIR,

So soon as I learned that we are nearer neighbours than we have been hitherto, I felt myself unable to resist forming a friendly project of reunion, which I have begged M. de Carcavy to interpret. In one word, Sir, I aspire to embrace you, and to enjoy a few days' conversation with you; but, as my health is no stronger than your own, I venture to hope that you will spare me part of the road, and fix on some half-way house between Clermont and Toulouse, where I could meet you late in September or early in October. If you cannot make up your mind to attempt this excursion, you run the risk of seeing me arrive as a claimant on your hospitality, which might be embarrassed by the presence of two such sick men. I await your answer in much impatience, and am, Sir, with all my heart, entirely yours,

FERMAT.

This letter greatly troubled its recipient. Pascal was not far from considering it a snare of that *libido sciendi* which had so often caught his feet in its toils. Intellectual curiosity was never dead in Pascal. Fermat was one of his most frequent correspondents, a man of the highest character, a great mathematician, whom he had often desired to meet. And what a flower of courtesy was this invitation addressed by a man of sixty, eminent and ailing, to a young colleague !

It was a difficult letter to answer, for Pascal was determined not to encounter Fermat. If God had spared his life it was that he might compose that *Apology for Christianity* destined to convert the unbeliever. More than a year before he had delivered on that theme a lecture at Port-Royal, which several of his hearers had taken down in writing, but his thoughts had travelled far since then ; not argument, but feeling, must inspire him if he would touch and save a soul—such a soul as Méré's, as Montaigne's ; he saw them rise before his inner eye, infinitely dear ; so beautiful, and doomed ! If he would accomplish his mission he must not let the fumes of vain conceptions, of sudden friendships, arise between him and the spirit of Truth. No, he must not see Fermat. Who knows ? Fermat, perhaps, was one of those he had to convert—but not by discussing curves and tangents.

Therefore, with deep regret, Pascal set himself to write a letter so worded that it should not wound the kindest, the most eminent, the most admired of his scientific correspondents :

BIENASSIS,
August 10, 1660.

SIR,

You are the most courteous of gentlemen; and I am assuredly one of those most fitted by Nature to appreciate such a quality, and to admire it infinitely, especially when associated with talents such as yours. And this is why I feel that I must, with my own hand, express my gratitude for your offer, although I am as yet barely able to hold a pen, or to read what I have written. But the honour you do me is so dear to me that I hasten to acknowledge it at once.

Sir, had I been in good health, I should have flown to Toulouse, nor would I have suffered a man like you to take a single step towards such a man as I. I take you to be the greatest geometer in Europe, but it is not for that especially that I feel thus drawn towards you, but I imagine such a flow of wit and courtesy in your conversation as would suffice to make any man desire your society. For, to tell you frankly what I think concerning geometry, I hold it to be the loftiest training of our mental faculties, but, at the same time, so useless that I make scant difference between a man who is nothing but a geometer and a clever artisan. Geometry, I take it, is the finest craft of any; I mean it is but that: a craft, an occupation, excellent as a trial of our strength, but not sufficient for its sole exercise. I would not go out of my way two steps for Geometry, and I am sure, Sir, that you are of my opinion.

Now there is this, also, to consider: I am employed on studies so different from our problems and axioms that I can scarcely believe another pursuit exists. I turned to geometry a year or so gone by upon a special occasion. And now, having done what I had to do, I fancy that I shall never think about it any more. For one thing, my health is not strong enough as yet. I am still so weak that I cannot sit on horseback or walk without a stick. Neither can I ride in a coach more than three or four leagues in the day, so that I took two-and-twenty days travelling hither from Paris. The doctors say I ought to go to Bourbon in September, to drink the waters there. These two months gone, I promised that when I leave that place, I will go thence by water to Saumur, in order to stay until Christmas with my friend the Duc de Roannez, the Governor of Poitou, who has for me a kindness far exceeding my deserts. Orleans is on the

way to Saumur, and when I get so far on my road, if I feel too ill I shall go straight on to Paris. This, Sir, is the present state of my plans, which I am obliged to explain in detail so that you may understand why I cannot accept the honour that you propose, which I hope with all my heart to be able at some other time to acknowledge, either to you yourself, Sir, or to your children, to whom I am no less devoted, having a peculiar veneration for all those who bear the name of him who is, to my thinking, the greatest man alive.

And I am ever your obedient servant,

BLAISE PASCAL.

Pascal was back in Paris in November. He had again changed his lodging and now rented a pleasant house just outside the Porte-Saint-Michel, close to the Luxembourg Gardens, already lovely in their fresh splendour. The Palace, then, was but forty years old. There was a tennis court on either side of Pascal's house, so that it was not much overlooked—a convenience when one's visitors may often be men in hiding—an Arnauld, a Nicole, or the like. It was furnished when he first set up house there like a gentleman's home, with tapestries on the wall, fine carved cabinets, silver plate, pictures, a handsome library, with a coach and horse in the stable. But all these good things had a tendency to disappear little by little, leaving odd gaps and blanks and sudden penuries. For the spirit of Charity had taken possession of Blaise Pascal. Despite his lameness and consequent necessities, the horse was sold ; then the hangings went ; the comfortable chairs ; even the books—till at last, in the bare and staring rooms, a Bible and a Saint-Augustine reigned over a few insignificant pamphlets. If the servants did not leave him (they were the two sisters and the brother-in-

law of that Louise Delfaut who had been his nurse), at least he gave them very little to do, going into the kitchen to fetch the tray on which his meagre meal was spread, and taking it back again when he had finished the pittance (never exceeded, always faithfully consumed) which he considered necessary for the maintenance of his health. He made his own bed, waited upon himself, discouraging all visits. The finite had ceased to interest Pascal, and this humour grew more absolute, because he was constantly alone. He was in truth a Solitary. The Duc de Roannez was in Poitou. A dispute, concerning which I shall have more to say, divided Pascal from his friends of Port-Royal, many of whom were still absent or in hiding. Worst of all, his sister Jacqueline was no longer at Port-Royal-de-Paris (so that her brother was deprived of those dear colloquies and confessions which had been his fondest relaxation), for she had recently been sent to the Abbey-in-the-Fields as Mistress of the Novices. The Périers were in Auvergne. And Pascal felt himself detached from mortal ties. This indeed was Solitude ! *Sola Beatitudo.* For there is a sort of pleasure in forswearing pleasure in view of greater joy to come, and in renouncing all society in order to approach an invisible companion.

CHAPTER XIV

JACQUELINE REAPPEARS AND DISAPPEARS

SUDDENLY, on the stairs, a shout of boyish laughter and the three young Périers appeared upon the scene. Since the school of Port-Royal had been disbanded in the spring, the eldest lad, Etienne, had been his uncle's guest ; and now here come the little fellows, Louis and Blaise, nine and seven years old, who had been staying about among friends (perhaps in the house of the Duc de Roannez, whose sister had taken charge of their sisters) during these enforced holidays. The two younger boys now found themselves, for some reason, momentarily dislodged, and their Aunt Jacqueline, not knowing what to do with them, had dispatched them to her brother's address. Ah, that sick, sad, lonely brother, with whom she could hold so little communication—who knows but she might reach him through these innocent, turbulent proxies ! She had bid them be off in one of her impulsive moods, thinking they might rouse Blaise from his introspective melancholy ; and, when the deed was done, her heart misgave her. Had she done right to incommode, molest, so strict and so austere a bachelor ? The boys' appearance in the house outside the Porte-Saint-Michel was speedily followed by a quaint and pretty letter of apology.

"Good day, my dearest brother; I wish you a happy New Year! I know I ought to have sent you my good wishes these ten months gone by, but you know very well that you have been in the depth of my heart since the first of the year, though I express the thought so late in the day. And, even so, I think that I forestall *you* in the matter!

"During all this year, which I have given utterly to God, I have robbed you of none of the love which I may still bear you, in Him. Dear God! when I reflect how quickly this year has slipped away—and how this separation, which seemed intolerable beforehand, has been lightly accomplished, it seems to me that Time's no great matter, and I long for Eternity! But I must not let my pen wander on and lead me astray. I am not writing to please myself (for, as a nun, my only satisfaction must be in heaven), nor in the belief that my letter may give you any pleasure, for I feel myself of too small account to hope for such a thing, but, rather, to congratulate you on having become the father of a family—in somewhat the same sense that God is our Father—and also to ask your forgiveness for all the trouble that I have inflicted on you, for I am the cause of it all, and I fear that I must have put you to great inconvenience. I did it in the belief that you would like to have the children, and that the disturbance would last but a little while, for M. R—— will soon be able to take them back again—indeed, I think he could receive them at any moment, if you find them a nuisance, and if you will send him word. Give the children my love. As for you, I say nothing; you can judge of my feelings by your own. Only I assure you that I am all yours in Him who, more even than by nature, has united us in Grace."

Jacqueline—high-handed, gay, ironical and sweet—all Jacqueline is in this letter, where something of the *précieuse* is mixed with the vocabulary of the Saint. A strange idea she had, in likening Pascal to the father of a family! Lofty and austere, dedicated to the Infinite and the Eternal, he constantly rebelled against the natural instincts of his heart. When Gilberte Périer at last arrived in Paris, he

could not endure to see her kiss her children. And sometimes that fond woman, in tears, would complain to Jacqueline that the brother whom she worshipped did not love her. " J'étais toute surprise des rebuts qu'il me faisait quelque fois." The tears would start to her eyes at the thought of his aloofness: " Ses manières froides." Jacqueline knew better : Pascal, though not affectionate, was capable of the most absolute and the most chivalrous devotion. No service was too great to ask of him. On this occasion he welcomed the little boys. There was something imperious and gay at the root of him which suited the society of children. He gave his nephews house-room, paid their expenses, exacted from them (we may be sure) none of the austerities he used himself, and managed to instil his rudiments into the stupid little Louis—a feat which no one, hitherto, had been able to accomplish.

He could allow himself to love and serve a stupid child, for that was charity. He dreaded his sister's fond endearments—and also, perhaps, the voice, the pleading eyes, the letters, of Mademoiselle de Roannez, fearing lest they might attach him to this mortal life which he so soon must quit. And who was he to engross the affections of an immortal soul, whose goal should be nothing less than God? After Pascal's death Madame Périer found among his papers these words which illuminate the scrupulous, not untender, soul of a mystic :

" It is unjust that I should engage another's affections, although they should attach themselves to me of their own free will and pleasure. For I must needs deceive any whose

desires I might awaken, since I am no one's final aim, and have not in myself that which could satisfy another soul. Am I not near the hour of death ? And so the object of their attachment must die ! Therefore I should be guilty to raise false hopes, though I could sweetly persuade them, and were gladly believed, and were glad to be so believed. Yet I should be guilty to let another love me ; rather should I warn off any such as might fall into that error ; despite the good that I should gain thereby, they must not believe me ; they must not tie themselves to such as I am, but rather use their lives and their endeavours in seeking God and in loving their Redeemer " (fr. 471).

One day an old aunt in Auvergne wrote to the Périers proposing a match between their elder daughter, Jacqueline (still a schoolgirl exiled from Port-Royal), and her husband's nephew, young M. Chabre. This good lady, the widow of a well-to-do lawyer at Riom, proposed to leave her fortune to Jacqueline Périer and the business to this young man ; though the bride was barely sixteen, they were still of a suitable age, and, beginning so prosperously, might hope to flourish and multiply.

Madame Périer, perhaps a little elate, consulted her brother as to this fine scheme, which put Pascal beside himself with rage. He loved these two young nieces as though they had been angels. Their purity enchanted him. There is a line in one of his letters to Mademoiselle de Roannez in which he describes himself as feeling " numb with respect " in their presence, " principally towards the one on whom the miracle was worked, because there is something so extraordinary in such a favour, but the other

one also is full of piety, and indeed there are few like her." We may, perhaps, say that Jacqueline Périer, though without any talent, resembled her uncle by a natural earnestness, a delicacy of frame, a solitary bent, more than the other children. And it was this white lily, grown in a convent garden, that well-meaning women proposed to hand over to the tender mercies of a young lawyer in the provinces! . . . Pascal dipped his pen in his most caustic ink and wrote, over the head of Madame Périer, the following answer to old Madame Chabre.

"I have taken the advice of my friends, and, to sum it up in a few words, their opinion is that—unless you offend all charity, wound your conscience with a mortal sin, and wilfully commit one of the greatest crimes—No, you cannot engage so young a child, so innocent, so pious—no, you cannot enlist her in the basest of all Christian conditions. The affair, no doubt, is plausible enough from a worldly point of view; but in the sight of God, things look different. From that point of view, such a marriage is as vile and noxious as it may seem desirable in the eyes of worldlings. She is so young! You cannot tell as yet to what high destiny she may be called. Her temperament may be of the tranquil sort which supports virginity without distress. To marry her so soon would be making too light of a blessing, desirable for us all, but especially for parents, in the persons of their children, since they can no longer hope it for themselves, and can restore to Heaven only through their offspring that which they lost, as a rule, for quite other reasons than the Love of God.

"Moreover, husbands, however well to do and worthy they may seem to be, are no better than rank pagans before Heaven. So that the last word of the gentlemen I consulted was: that to engage so young a child to a common ordinary man is a sort of homicide—nay, I will say a Deicide!—committed on her person."

Get thee to a nunnery, Ophelia!

"*Voilà comme il concevait la tendresse,*" comments Madame Périer, "entirely reasonable, without attachment or amusement, because charity can only tend towards God and have no other earthly end in view."

Pascal was still too exhausted to attempt the great task which was now his *raison d'être*, that *Apology for Christianity*, by which he hoped to convert the infidels of Paris, even as Saint Thomas Aquinas, attempting a similar enterprise, had meant to bring home to the true faith the Moors in Spain. He could but jot here and there a casual note, a reminiscence or suggestion, so slight that often no other, save himself, could puzzle a meaning out of so brief a memorandum. He was still hewing the wood and making the bricks with which to build his pious temple, not yet sufficiently restored to health to attempt its architecture.

Patience was easier now that he knew himself to be eternal; himself—that is to say, his soul. Yet there were hours when the old doubts returned, and the giddy sense of Infinite Nothingness. There were nights, especially, when the eternal silence of those unending spaces would still fill him with fear. I give the record of one such mood—a note which Port-Royal did not dare to publish in the first edition of the *Pensées*, and which never saw the light until Faugère printed it in 1844.

"Normal people are able to stop thinking about things on which they do not wish to think. 'Do not think about the passing of the Messiah!' said a Jew to his son. People in our

days follow the same precept. And so they preserve false religions. And even, I may say, so they continue to keep in touch with true religion. They can stop thinking when they like. It is the case with most people. But there are some who do not possess this gift of preventing their thoughts from going on thinking, and who dream all the more because they know that they are forbidden to dream. Souls such as these resist a false religion—ay, and even true religion—wherever the argument does not strike them as solid" (fr. 259).

Pascal and Jacqueline seemed in those days to have changed places : he, in retirement, shrinking into the shyest seclusion, pressing sometimes to an emaciated flank the spikes of a penitential belt, to all intents, a monk ; she, eminent, capable, frequently consulted, looked upon as a force for the future. She had already risen to be Sub-Prioress at the Abbey-in-the-Fields ; and in the spring of 1661, if the serious illness of Mère Angélique Arnauld filled with sadness all the adherents of Port-Royal, many comforted themselves with thinking that Sœur Jacqueline de Sainte-Euphémie had in her the promise of another great Abbess for the coming troubles.

Jacqueline's courage and character were of a heroic quality, tempered by conscience only, never by fear. They were to be put to the test. . . . When Cardinal Mazarin died in March 1661, Port-Royal had breathed a sigh of deep relief. Never have innocent Saints (or Sectaries) been more deceived ! There had been in Mazarin a quality of Italian indifference by which they had profited. If he could not comprehend a refusal to obey the Pope, still he felt, on the whole, little interest in the vagaries of an eccentric

rural abbey, for his mind just then was filled by vast, Royal affairs : he was negotiating the Peace of the Pyrenees. Mazarin loved no virtue, hated no vice ; a statesman at heart, his chief preoccupation was not to compromise himself in ecclesiastical affairs ; and so, after that perplexing miracle of the Holy Thorn, he had left Port-Royal pretty much alone. But his successor was a young King, filled to the brim with the overweening sense of his own immediate authority—absolute, determined to rule, especially decided to reduce to all due submission the miserable relics of the Fronde, among whom he included the recluses of Port-Royal :

" I applied myself at once (so Louis-Quatorze wrote in his *Memoirs*) to destroy Jansenism, and to disperse those communities that harboured still the spirit of innovation ; well-intentioned, no doubt, they were, but ignorant, and wilfully ignorant of the dangerous consequences which their errors must entail."

Persecution began without delay. Not only were all the pupils, all the postulants, all the novices, disbanded and sent home to their respective families, the Convent itself was outraged by the domiciliary visits of Royal officers, and in the midst of all this tumult Mother Angélique died of a broken heart. But the greatest trial of all was the signing of the Formulary. After the Holy Thorn, that fever had subsided. The young King revived it. He wrote to Rome, he wrote to the Bishops, and worked so well that by April every priest, deacon, monk or nun in France was liable to be requested to sign a declaration stating that they " abhorred and con-

demned with heart and lips the Five Propositions contained in the *Augustinus* of Jansenius, Bishop of Ypres." As we know, the Jansenists were divided into two camps. Some were for tearful submission ; others for resistance. There was, at one moment, a real danger that Port-Royal might secede from the Roman Church. And this no doubt was the secret hope of their adversaries.

Politics came to the aid of Port-Royal. The vagrant and proscribed Archbishop of Paris, the Cardinal de Retz, when he went out into exile, had left behind him two Vicars-General to administer his diocese. On June 19th these ecclesiastics, seeking to preserve and propitiate Port-Royal (which had always been favourable to the banished Prelate), published an *Ordonnance* or Pastoral Letter, advising persons obliged to sign the Formulary to add a " rider " affirming their humble submission to the Pope in the matter of faith, while maintaining a respectful reserve as to the matter of fact, which they could not assert.

In after days Arnauld admitted that he " and his friends " had drawn up that *Ordonnance*, and among those friends, he said, was Pascal. Pascal temporizing ? Pascal advising submission ? Pascal authorizing the innocent to sign their belief in a lie ? Ah, but if the Church should punish rudely the disobedient, on whom would fall the blow ? On Jacqueline and her companions. There lies the secret of his reluctant docility.

The nuns at Port-Royal-de-Paris wept as they gave their signature, yet, following the counsel of

their superiors, they signed. At Port-Royal-des-Champs a wilder spirit reigned. The Sisters took up the fatal pen, it dropped from their hands, unused.

Jacqueline had recognized her brother's touch in the *Ordonnance*. One day in June she wrote to Antoine Arnauld, and to Mère Angélique-de-Saint-Jean, the new Abbess. How bitter she is! Had a Jesuit drawn up that *Ordonnance* (she says) she could understand its subtlety, for it was the very cleverest way of consenting to a lie without denying the truth; nothing could be more adroit. Yet,

"Tell me, my dear Sister, do you see any difference, really, between these disguises, and the burning of incense before an idol on the pretext that one has a crucifix hidden up one's sleeve? . . .

"If I speak so freely about the *Ordonnance*, it is because I have more right than another *on account of him who had so large a share in it.* I praise God for his zeal, which fills me with an incredible joy. After all, he may be useful to the weaker brethren. Yet, what is well enough for them, would be a horrible weakness in others. . . . For, believe me, Truth alone can save us! . . . I know that it is not a woman's part to defend the truth, and yet, in this sad circumstance, one might say that when Bishops show the courage of women, women may show the courage of Bishops. It is not our part to fight for the truth, yet we may be admitted to die for the Truth!"

On August 22nd Jacqueline Pascal was summoned to appear before the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and her examination shows so much shrewdness, so much sweetness, such an innocent adroitness, that our mind involuntarily reverts to the trial of Jeanne d'Arc. But all her courage and all her cleverness could not save her. She signed the Formulary. She was compelled to sign it. And then she drooped,

and, before many weeks were out, she died. Wrought to such a pitch of fever and excitement, delicate organisms snap at too rough a touch (as I can well believe who have lived through the Affaire Dreyfus). M. de Rebours was another victim of the signature ; there were several at Port-Royal.

Jacqueline Pascal died at the Abbey-in-the-Fields on October 5, 1661, aged thirty-six years ; it was the morrow of her birthday. When a nun dies in her convent, especially in such a season of storm and stress, few details come through. Learning the mortal illness of her sister, Gilberte Périer hurried to Port-Royal ; it would seem, from a letter of Nicole's, that she arrived too late. Although Jacqueline Pascal's death produced a sort of consternation at Port-Royal—so brilliant was she, so young still, so beloved—no one tells us what form her sickness took. " She died of the Signature," repeated all the echoes of the Abbey. And we can but reiterate : She died of the Signature.

At first no one ventured to break the news to Pascal.

" Happily, Monsieur de Roannez is here (writes the Abbess of Port-Royal-de-Paris), though I know that in such a loss God only and our faith in Him can help us."

And Gilberte Périer tells us :

" My brother could love no one else so well as he loved my sister, and he did well to love her so. He saw her frequently. She was in all things his confidante, and always, in all things, she satisfied him completely. For there was between their natures so intimate a correspondence that never did the one jar upon the other, while their hearts were ever as one heart.

Each found in the other one such consolation as those can imagine who have tasted some such happiness and know what it is to love and to be loved in utter confidence, each with the other abundantly content, never apprehensive of possible division.

" Yet, when my sister died, my brother said nothing when he learned the news, save these few words : ' God grant us to die such a Christian death ! ' And he began immediately to speak of the favours that God had granted her during her life, and in the circumstances of her end. Then, lifting his heart to Heaven, where he believed her to be already arisen in bliss, he exclaimed in a sort of transport :

" ' Blessed are the Dead that die in the Lord ! ' "

Pascal had lost his earthly guide. For, in that light, he looked on Jacqueline (and thought her the first of his spiritual directors).

But in the quiet hours of solitude, he found by his side the unseen guide that needs no earthly shape.

" Often I speak to thee, and give thee good counsel, because thy guide can no longer converse with thee, and I will not leave thee uncompanioned.

" Moreover, it may be that the prayers of thy guide move me to direct thee from within ; and so the same guide, invisible, still leadeth thee on thy way.

" Let not thy heart be disquieted within thee " (fr. 555).

CHAPTER XV

A DISPUTE AMONG FRIENDS

WHEN Gilberte Périer had gone back to her children, Pascal sat in his study alone, thinking on that heroic and beloved soul who had passed so arduously from earth to heaven. "When Bishops show the courage of women, then women must show the courage of Bishops," she had said; and again: "Who can cry shame on the lamb that bleats to wake the shepherd, when the wolf prowls round the fold?"

Such phrases woke a deep echo in the heart of Pascal. He might have written them—and he had written just the contrary. Jacqueline had blamed his pusillanimity. She had thought bitter things about his "timid conscience." She had said: "Let them sign who will, so that they do not prevent bolder spirits from showing a firmer front."

Pascal had not been required to sign, being merely a layman. But he had, with Arnauld, advised others to sign, and it seemed to him that he had condemned his sister to her martyrdom. Yet it was love and reverence for the nuns of the Abbey which had dictated those *Ordonnances*, that, in Jacqueline's phrase, were but a manner of consenting to a lie, without ostensibly denying the truth. The Solitaries of Port-Royal did not fear for themselves: they had

their network of secret routes and hiding-places, but they trembled for the Ladies of the Valley, " nos Dames, nos Maîtresses et nos Souveraines," as Antoine Lemaître had called them. These men foresaw to what lengths might run the anger of a King. Could they stand by and see their lilies uprooted, brutally torn from their refuge by laughing soldiery, and exiled, one by one, in distant convents, without communication, without sympathy ? Pity and reverence had guided the hand which wrote that Pastoral for the Vicars-General.

So Pascal had thought ; even so he had endeavoured to serve his sister and her companions. He had mingled a vain human complacency with the things that are of God. He had preferred temporal peace to spiritual truth. And he judged his conduct now with the mind of Jacqueline.

Indeed, during that vigil, it seemed as if Jacqueline's ghost had entered into the frame of her watching brother, to bend his thoughts and to dictate his acts. Perhaps then his mind reverted to the letter which he had sent the Périers three weeks after his father's death :

" J'ai appris d'un saint homme dans notre affliction qu'une des plus solides et plus utiles charités envers les morts est de faire les choses qu'ils nous ordonneraient s'ils étaient encore au monde."

His path was clear. Henceforth he must continue Jacqueline's activities, maintain her convictions, serve her ideas, renounce a line of conduct that had so grievously offended her and no longer cry " Peace ! " where there was no peace.

"Do you see any difference really between these disguises and the burning of incense before an idol on the pretext that one has a crucifix hidden up one's sleeve?"

Ah, she had remembered his own phrase in the *Provinciales*! Jacqueline had called them Jesuits! The subtle and prudent Nicole might be guilty of such feints, but Arnauld, the little black lion of Port-Royal, the Benjamin of the Arnaulds, the darling of the valley—fierce, ardent, wise, brave, indomitable—how could he excuse a course of action so little consonant with his true nature? Was Arnauld no more frank than a Jesuit?

Such an idea must have seemed impossible to Pascal. But we, who have another idea of a Jesuit than he, might admit it. And one day Malebranche, writing to Father Tellier, was to say: "Je plains fort Monsieur Arnauld de ressembler exactement à l'auteur de ce livre infame, *La Morale Pratique.*" . . . And in our own days a gifted friend of the Society, Abbé Henri Brémond (who in his *History of Religious Feeling in France* has painted a living portrait of the great Arnauld), finds in him all the Jesuit's qualities of abnegation, courage, zeal. The same absence of inner life, also, and the same omniscient shallowness.

Harshly and angrily Pascal broke away from Arnauld and Nicole. Arnauld loved his friend and easily forgave his violence, seeing his grief. Nicole, a smaller man, never quite forgot the despotic tone of Pascal's recriminations; we hear him murmuring, years afterwards, that he could not endure "d'être si fièrement régenté." Did Pascal lord it over them

so proudly? He avenged his sister, and his own share in their *Ordonnance*.

Complications were continually arising; the world stands still for no man's sorrow. Not a month after Jacqueline's death the Vicars-General put forward a new Pastoral advising acceptance of the Formulary. Arnauld urged the nuns to sign with a rider stating that the weakness of their sex forbade their deciding matters so far beyond their ken; Nicole bade them sign and have done with it. Pascal then arose in his wrath, sending eager, passionate letters to his friends, of which, I think, we still find traces in the *Pensées*:

"When Israel came out of Egypt, despite the will of kings, through the waves of the sea, across the pathless desert, fed by manna, God showed that He was capable of saving His flock" (fr. 675).

One evening in November, Arnauld, Nicole, the Périers, and other persons eminent in the councils of Port-Royal, were assembled at Pascal's house without the city gates (so convenient in its loneliness for meetings of this sort), and proceeded to discuss this affair of the Formulary. Marguerite Périer, the young *miraculée* of the Holy Thorn, at that time a girl of sixteen, has left us a vivid account, written down many years later:

"All the gentlemen of Port-Royal who were present—I do not know their names for certain, except M. Arnauld and M. Nicole—all of them (having listened to what was said on both sides) adhered, either from deference or from real conviction, to the views expressed by M. Arnauld and M. Nicole, who had drawn up this new rider to the signature. My uncle, who loved Truth above everything, and who was exhausted by a con-

tinual headache, had strained his strength to its last extremity in order to convince his friends, expressing himself with great animation, although so worn and frail" (*Lettres opuscules, Mémoires*, p. 465, Faugère).

The clause which the assembled Jansenists were discussing ran as follows: "Holding nothing so precious as our Faith, we sincerely and heartily embrace and admit whatsoever the Pope may decide." But there is one thing no less precious than faith, it is truth. Can we in any circumstances sign that which we suspect to be a lie? The very spirit of Jacqueline seemed to inspire her brother.

"Does not Saint-Bernard say that the least member of the Church has a right to protest with might and main when he sees his pastors and masters falling into error? . . . And, if it be not our part to fight for the Truth, yet may it be our part to die for the Truth and to dare all things rather than forsake it."

The pastors and masters of Port-Royal listened with dour and disapproving faces. They were already agreed on the line they meant to take, and showed some surprise at so passionate an opposition. But Pascal would not easily accept to be gainsaid on any matter that he had at heart. He did not know what it was to please by flattery or dissimulation, and was incapable of not saying what he thought.

"Indeed (adds Madame Périer), people who did not know him were often surprised at the part he took in a general conversation, where it would seem that he must always have the upper hand, with a sort of domination; but it was the quickness of his mind that was the cause of it; and one was not long in

his company before one began to find something lovable in this same overriding spirit. . . . He was not perfect. The extreme hastiness of his temper made him sometimes hard to satisfy."

On this occasion he was especially animated. In moments of passion Pascal would speak loudly, earnestly—we have many testimonies as to the force and loudness of his voice in moments of great mental tension ; but he convinced neither Arnauld nor Nicole. We can imagine the scene : the Crucifix on the wall, the dim, bare room, stripped of its carpets and its hangings, the Puritans in their black cloaks and plain linen collars—and the fragile, earnest figure of the enthusiast, straining his anxious, eager voice in vain. . . . When he felt the minds of his friends slip from his grasp, unmodified, his head swam, and, in the utter misery of his disappointment, Pascal sank to the ground in a swoon. No doubt but in that hour of bitterness he murmured in his heart : " My God, my God, hast Thou forsaken me ? " and as Madame Périer lifted the unconscious head, the dark room grew darker still in the shadow of the Cross.

He remained some while without speech or consciousness. Consternation filled the little assembly, while Pascal's friends flocked round trying one means after another to revive him. Then the Gentlemen of Port-Royal left the room. There remained only the Duc de Roannez, Madame Périer, Etienne Périer (now a lad of about eighteen), and Domat, Pascal's especial friend from Clermont. When the sufferer had quite regained possession of his senses,

his sister asked him what had been the cause of so sudden and so serious a fainting fit, and Pascal replied :

" When I saw those whom I had always looked upon as the peculiar champions of the Truth fall away from it and appear to forsake it, I was seized with such a pang, so intolerable, that I could but swoon."

At once relieved and exhausted, Pascal came to himself. Perhaps in that sudden nerve-storm all the violence of contrition, grief, remorse, which had been gathering in his head since Jacqueline died, burst in one supreme explosion. He felt weak, humble. Had he been left to himself I think he would then and there have left these polemics and opened, in his rich nature, some other vein. But the Gentlemen of Port-Royal, departing from his house, left him in the charge of his sister and of Domat, staunch Auvergnats, passionate provincials, with the most definite and downright sense of right and wrong.

So for some little while he still kept up some vain opposition. There was an angry, irritable vein in Pascal. Did not a gardener of the Abbey once remark to Antoine Arnauld that " M. Pascal always looked as if he were just going to swear " ? Did not Racine tell his son that if M. Singlin usually gave in to M. Pascal, it was because the latter had such a loud voice, " and M. Singlin would give in to a loud voice " ? Pascal was still angry with his friends, because he loved them so dearly and yet could not convince them. Once more he thought (as in the days when he had cast aside the *Provinciales*), " Je

ne suis pas de Port-Royal. Je suis seul." He now again resumed these "Petites Lettres," writing a series of Epistles against Port-Royal, which he confided to his friend Domat, enjoining him to publish them if the nuns of the Abbey should sign the Formulary, to burn them all should they stand firm. Whatever the literature of France may have lost, I cannot but be glad of that holocaust.

For the letters were sacrificed. On July 7, 1662, a third *Ordonnance* exacted absolute obedience : there must be no rider to the signature. From the great Arnauld himself to the youngest novice in the Convent, Port-Royal rejected the Formulary, refused to sign it. Pascal found himself once more among his friends, shoulder to shoulder ; and his love for them again was blent with esteem and admiration. The last vestige of passion and rancour left him. He bade a long farewell, a last farewell, to that vanity of battle and polemics which so long had stirred his soul. He strove to find a surer path, a better way, to reach the peace of God.

Meanwhile the anger of the King fell, like a shower of arrows, on Port-Royal. M. Singlin was banished to Quimper in Brittany, and a Confessor of the King's choosing established in his stead. Some dozen of the more prominent sisters were transplanted into alien convents. Fortunately for our Abbey, in August 1662 the French Ambassador at Rome received some outrage or insult for which Pope Alexander refused to give satisfaction. Hence a sort of semi-rupture, a coolness between the

Vatican and Versailles, which, lasting several years, had at least the advantage of diminishing the prestige of the Ultramontanes and procuring a breathing space of peace and quiet for Port-Royal.

CHAPTER XVI

"LES PENSÉES"

PASCAL sits in his study; he is thinking. He sits there alone hour after hour. To the people of the house he appears purely passive, pitiable, in his extreme absorption and absence from their habitual come-and-go; but this complete detachment from outward things is not unknown to minds that have the habit of intense and persevering thought. That which seems the dull reverie of weakness may be a state infinitely enviable. We remember Archimedes, who would let the hours run by and never think of nourishment; or Socrates, still standing, a whole day and night, rapt in thought, upon the self-same spot; or Isaac Newton, sitting all day long half-dressed upon his bed, while in his brain the clear conception of the *Principles* absorbed his being. Such was the condition of Pascal. He was lost in meditation, dazzled by the white inrush of spiritual light, flooding his soul. He was now too weak to write.

He would sit for hours, brooding. He had always been given to meditate; accustomed to carry a thought in his head for months, nourishing it in solitary walks and sittings, before he wrote it down. It was, in fact, his habit (as it was to be Pasteur's) to make no clear distinction between his working

hours and his leisure. But then he had possessed a marvellous memory, and the page that he would set down in writing was already polished and perfect. Since his late illness all that was changed ; the glorious faculty had failed him ; he could sometimes not remember the end of the phrase he had begun to write :

" and this weakness (we read on one of his slips) instructs me more than the thought I have forgotten, for it brings home to me the nothingness that I am."

When he would wake at last out of his solitary musings, he would take the first odd scrap of paper that came to hand (half-sheets, backs of letters and such-like), jotting down a word here and there, sometimes only half a word, the barest reminder—for little did he think that any other than himself would examine these stray notes, which he disposed to help a wandering memory, as Psyche cast down those pebbles to guide the path of her return. Sometimes he was too tired to hold a pen ; he would then ask any person who happened to be in the room with him to set down a few words at his dictation : Madame Périer, Nicole, Etienne ; sometimes a servant whose blundering pen contrasts pathetically with the thought that it expresses ; once or twice a child, an Auvergnat child (perhaps little Louis Périer, who spells " chanchelier " for " chancelier ").

In this way there accumulated a veritable chaos of fragments, which for two hundred and sixty-five years have been at once the ravishment and the despair of Pascal's biographers. There are *Pensées* three words long (such as " obéissance de fantaisie,"

or "hommes naturellement couvreurs"—men by nature tilers ! . . .) while others are serried, brilliant arguments or incomparable dialogues. . . . When first the learned doctors of Port-Royal, in company with M. de Roannez and Etienne Périer, opened this long-expected treasure, they felt their heads reel, for they could make nothing of it. There was no thread to guide them through the labyrinth. The Duke, a true man of the world, mistrustful of the eccentric, advised the Committee to turn into finished prose so much of the writing as they could make out, and publish that, in memory of M. Pascal. Thanks be to God, honest Gilberte Périer was there, who would not hear of any tampering with her brother's manuscript. So they gummed the fragments in an album, copied them, and spent eight years in choosing the least surprising—which then saw the light, after all considerably manipulated.

When towards the middle of the nineteenth century, first of all Faugère, then Victor Cousin, followed by Havet and, finally, by M. Michaut, published their four respective versions drawn more directly from the original manuscript, confusion appeared worse confounded. Nor in our own time have M. Victor Giraud, nor even MM. Brunschvicg and Gazier, quite cleared up the fascinating mystery of the *Pensées*; and who could hope to succeed where M. Brunschvicg failed ? Yet, even as I write these pages, a new arrangement has been proposed, which seems to bring some order into chaos, to assemble the brilliant fragments of the shattered mirror into a shape that will fit a frame.

Evidently the *Pensées* have little in common with that *Apology for Christianity* which Pascal had sketched in a lecture at Port-Royal. They seem to be the relics of several meditations. And here let me say that no classic author has ever been so fortunate as Pascal has been in his twentieth-century commentators; for, if M. Léon Brunschvicg embodies the *esprit de géométrie* in his lucid and exact classification, M. Fortunat Strowski is inspired by that *esprit de finesse* which knows how to assimilate, solicit and divine.

In the September number of the *Correspondant* (September 10, 1926) he offers a new key to these cryptic *Pensées*: the fragments, he supposes, of five meditations, floating spars of a fleet that never took the sea, ruins of an Ark of Safety overwhelmed before it was completed. No one better than M. Strowski knows that strange original manuscript of the *Pensées* (still preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale), where Pascal's notes have been jammed into a tight mosaic, just as they would fit, with no reference to their intention. Poring over them, noting the faintest sign, the least echo of contents, M. Strowski began to see which of these scattered relics belonged organically to some other, and so he has reconstructed five chief subjects—on which Pascal loved to muse and ponder. When we have ranged the *Pensées* under these five heads, we find that we have practically exhausted the amount, with the exception of rough notes for the *Provinciales* or other of Pascal's published writings.

I translate the first sketch of the famous *Wager*

(shorn of all those afterthoughts with which Pascal enriched it), and print it according to its original pattern. How strangely modern it reads—like a glorified page of Claudel! Timidly, tentatively, I add something of my own; for I print the *Wager* as a dialogue. It was, we know, destined to convert a free-thinker, and it seems to me we hear objection and answer as clearly as in the *Provinciales*. And I suppose Pascal's opponent to have been the Chevalier de Méré, who was his friend, and whom he hoped to convert.

MÉRÉ speaks: *Infinite nothing.*

MÉRÉ: *Our soul is flung into the body, and finds there number, time,*
Dimensions; it reasons thereupon, calling them Nature, Necessity,
And will believe naught else.

MÉRÉ: *A unit added to the Infinite augments it in no wise, no more than an ell*
Added to an infinite length: the Finite is abolished in presence of the Infinite, and becomes
A pure nothingness.

PASCAL: *We know that there exists*
An Infinite, and we ignore its nature;
As we know it is false that the tale of all numbers is told,
So must it be true that there is an Infinity of number.

PASCAL: *But we know not what it is. It were false to call it an even number,*
Neither is it an odd number, for, by adding a unit, Infinity
Cannot change its nature. Still it is a number; and every number
Is odd or even. True, I am speaking of finite numbers.

PASCAL: *And so we may know that there is a God, and yet not comprehend what He is.*

MÉRÉ: *Thus indeed do we know the existence and the nature of the finite,*
Because we are finite, and placed in space, even as it is;
We know the existence of the Infinite, and
We do not know its nature, because we are related to it by space,
Yet disproportionate, on account of our limits;
But we know neither the existence nor the nature of God
Because He is without space or limit.

PASCAL: *By faith we know His existence, by eternal glory His nature.*
I have already shown that we may know a thing exists yet not comprehend its nature.

PASCAL: *Now let us speak according to the light of Nature:*
If there be a God, He is infinite, incomprehensible, because without parts
Or limits. He has no relation to us; we are incapable of knowing
Even what He is like or whether He exists. Things being thus, who would dare to affirm
There is not, or there is a God? Not we, who have no relation to Him.
He is or He is not, as you like it. Which is your bent? Reason cannot help us here.
Chaos divides us from Him. 'Tis a trick of chance,
A mere toss-up at an infinite distance. What will you stake?
Heads or tails? Reason will not help you, Reason cannot advise
One or the other. The chances are equal.
But do not blame the untruth of those who have made their choice. For you yourself
Know nothing.

MÉRÉ: *No! yet I blame them; not because of their choice,*
But because they have chosen. Heads or tails, false alike:
The wise man does not accept the wager.

PASCAL: *Yes! But you must wager! You have no choice. You are playing the game.*
Which will you choose? Reflect! Since you must choose, think:
What are the risks? You have two stakes to lose or gain,
Your reason, and your will; your science, and your eternal bliss: your reason
Is not more hurt in choosing this than that. Your immortality!
See! If you wager God's existence and gain, you
Win everything! And, if you lose, you lose nothing. . . . Take the bet
Without more ado!

Such is the rough first sketch of the famous *Pari*, an admirable example of Pascal's keen audacity, rapidity, passion; of his way of giving the greatest number of points to his opponent, and then, in a final wrestle, whirling him off his feet and carrying him away, as if in a rush and rustle of wings.

The *Wager* occupies the first of Pascal's meditations, branching out into countless developments, expanding, unfolding, as was ever the process of thought in that long-brooding brain. Pascal, as M. Strowski subtly remarks, maintains an opinion, directly opposed to Descartes, who—impenitent metaphysician that he was!—considered that (though the body is the prisoner of space) the human mind is free and may rise on its own wings to the Infinite. But Pascal, the physicist, asserts that the mind can know nothing save that which it apprehends through the body, and that human thought cannot liberate itself from the conditions of matter, number, space and time.

The Second Meditation is concerned with the grandeur and the destitution of Man. (We remember how in his *Memorial* Pascal exclaimed : " Grandeur de l'Ame humaine ! ") The mind of man is great ; even in his abasement, however deep it be, man still is great ; all the works of his vanity and his concupiscence, though sterile, are marked by this same character. Pascal, from his bare room, looked out on the dawning reign of Louis the Fourteenth and saw that he could not deny it the quality of grandeur, and he admires that *règlement admirable,* those laws of justice and equity, that perfection of civilization, those triumphs of Art and reason, which (if looked at *sub specie æternitatis*) are but as chaff before the winnower's flail ; yet which, during their moment and in their sphere, are undoubtedly magnificent.

And at the same time he thinks of the intimate misery of Man, which is mixed with his grandeur and inseparable from it. And he sees the greatest of our race as no better than that shipwrecked sailor who, swimming for his life to a foreign isle, was greeted there as a king, almost a god, and who accepted this adulation, yet in his own heart knew himself for a wretched outcast, an impostor, with no title to the homage he received.

The more he knows himself for what he is—less than an atom—the truer is the grandeur of man, for he draws it only from his mind. " Pensée fait la grandeur de l'homme." . . .

" Man is but a reed, the frailest thing in Nature ; but he is a thinking reed. The universe need not put out its strength to crush him ; a mist, a drop of rain, suffice to lay him low. But

though the universe overwhelm him, yet is he nobler than that which compasses his ruin, for he knows that he dies, and the Cosmos remains unaware of its triumph " (fr. 347).

No subject was more frequently in the pondering mind of Pascal. Numerous are his thoughts on the grandeur and misery of Man.

The Third Meditation (always according to M. Strowski's classing) is on the disproportion, the disharmony, between Man and Nature, between Man and the Infinite, and between Man and Man. That mind of Man (which we have seen to be so great) shrinks paralysed before the conception of the Universe—that infinite Sphere whose centre is everywhere and which has no circumference. We cannot imagine its immensity, and so we stand, lost between two immensities; for, if the stars roll uncounted above our heads in the infinitely great, our senses fail as utterly to grasp that other world of the infinitely little. The mite, the midge on our hand, is perhaps another Universe, for the vastitude of Infinity can be circumscribed in this abridgment of an atom: each drop of its blood may be a firmament, a solar system, more difficult still to decipher than the other because it is writ so small (fr. 72).

To this Third Meditation, " Disproportion," we would place the innumerable *Pensées* concerning the fragility and uncertainty of our Ego: a bundle of potentialities which we bring into the world to be developed by Circumstance and Chance. Born in different conditions, what might each of us have become? That which seems our most intimate possession is but the sport of opportunity. We say

Custom is second nature; ought we not rather to define Nature as a second custom? So great a part of our being is involved in this said force of habit that we can do nothing thoroughly without it; we perform nothing to perfection until we can do it automatically. Therefore, in a strange phrase, Pascal calls upon his unbeliever to use this odd tendency of ours in the interest of his conversion:

"You wish to believe, and cannot find the way; you would fain be healed of your unfaith and can discover no balm? Follow the example of men who have suffered, even as you, and who now stake their all gladly—men who have found the way, men whom the balm has cured; do just as they did, from the very first. Behave as though you believed, take holy water, have Masses said for your soul, go to church, and, quite naturally, you will end by believing, and will blunt your intellect.

"'But that is just what I am afraid of.'

"Well, why? What do you lose by it?"

And in this same Meditation (which I think I should have called "Custom and Incongruity," instead of "Disproportion") we must range Pascal's thoughts on Social Order, on Tradition, on Nature and Grace; as we read them, Pascal appears to us as a fundamental anarchist of strong Conservative principles.

The Fourth Meditation is less interesting to a modern reader, for Pascal died before exegesis was born. In this division we range all his thoughts on the Old Testament, regarded as the symbol and the prophecy of the New. In the eyes of Pascal, prophecy was proof.

And the Fifth Meditation is rapt in the love of Jesus.

God is hidden from the eyes of men. Pascal exclaims, after Isaiah : Vere, tu es Deus absconditus ! But there is a path to find Him and Christ is the way. We know Christ not by our reason, but only by the movement of the heart. And the heart has reasons of its own that reason cannot understand. " Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connait point." The heart has a natural love for that Universal Being which is God ; and also a natural love of Self ; and the heart must make its choice. Whichsoever it chooses—God or Self—it will soon become stonily hard for the other. " Dieu sensible au cœur " : such is Faith. But all nature counsels man to leave God alone and choose himself.

The love of Jesus helps a man to vanquish self. But how, without Grace, can we feel the Love of Jesus ? " Fear not, thou wouldst not seek Me, hadst thou not already found Me." Thus we read, and many such messages ; and the culminating beauty of this final meditation is the *Gethsemane*, the " Mystery of Jesus."

CHAPTER XVII

THE LAST PHASE

OF Pascal's life there now remains but one chapter to write : that final chapter which is always tragic.

" Le dernier acte est sanglant, quelque belle que soit la comédie en tout le reste : on jette enfin de la terre sur la tête, et en voilà pour jamais " (fr. 210).

And in Pascal's case there is the added sadness that quarrels and controversies still rage round that last phase. What was the final attitude of Pascal towards Port-Royal ?

I think there is no doubt that he had passed beyond the extreme rigour of Jansenist doctrine ; the love of Jesus had dilated his heart, so that he could no longer believe that his divine Redeemer would leave to eternal perdition those that sin because they are shut out from Grace. The doctrine of Predestination (even under its modern name of Conditional Immortality) implies a certain hardness of heart in them that hold it ; and suffering had softened Pascal's heart. So we read in his *Gethsemane* that Christ, by that agony, redeemed " the human race." And I might multiply my quotations :

" If we examined our hearts, God would heal us and pardon us " (fr. 779).

" Jesus Christ never condemned a man unheard : to Judas He said : *Amice, ad quid venisti ?* And the same to the man who had no wedding garment " (fr. 780).

The following fragment is from a dialogue between a staunch adherent to the dogma of Predestination and one who would enlarge the benefits of Grace :

" For if you say that Christ Jesus did not die for all men, you incline the human heart to abuse its natural tendency to suppose that what is said of another may also be said of us ; and so you favour despair ; instead of turning the thoughts towards hope " (fr. 781).

And the man who thinks he is like to be damned will take so little care for his salvation that he may be damned in good earnest !

When Pascal wrote that thought, he was still only the Apostle that opposed a milder argument to the extreme rigour of his friends ; but, since then, that perpetual imitation of Christ, which had become the substance of his life, had opened wide the arms of the Jansenist's crucifix, those arms so desperately, so imploringly, so narrowly upraised to Heaven.

" All that we know, and all we need to know, is that we are miserable sinners, alienate from God, but redeemed by Jesus Christ. The whole universe tells us that we are sinners, and that we are redeemed " (fr. 360).

Pascal in his last days might have seemed almost a semi-Pelagian in the eyes of the Bishop of Ypres. But Jansenius had been in his grave some four-and-twenty years, and (since nothing ever stands still), the position of Port-Royal had imperceptibly changed : very slightly, very slowly, it had moved in the direction of Thomism. By a desperate effort

Pascal, while still standing firm among his friends, could still clasp, no less firmly, the hem of that seamless vesture of Christ, the Roman Church, from which, over and over again, he had exclaimed that he would not be severed : " Que je n'en sois jamais séparé ! "

Had he lived, could he have maintained this difficult attitude ? So much I dare not assert ! His was a spirit of strange vaults and sudden bounds. Montaigne might have converted the missionary of Montaigne. Or, and this seems to me more likely, the cruel persecution that soon was again to burst upon Port-Royal might have reinforced his Jansenist ardour, by revolting his chivalrous and fiery heart. Or he might once more have forsaken religion for geometry ; who knows ?

In a recent volume (*Présences*) M. André Suarès imagines Pascal as benefiting from another abatement of his complaint (as he might very well have done, for many a victim of tubercular peritonitis has lived till fifty-five) ; he pictures him visiting his banished friend, Arnauld, in the Low Countries. Towards 1670 Pascal might have pushed as far as Amsterdam and there have fallen in with a certain odd little Jew, Baruch de Spinoza, certainly, of all mortals, the most fit to understand at least one side of him. For Spinoza, too, was a " God-intoxicated man " ; he, too, was drunk with the idea of Deity, and lost in the intellectual Love of God. With a thrill of the heart one realizes that they might have met ; there were not ten years between them. But they did not meet, after all. Vain speculations, idle dreams !

Let us return to that bare room, with the crucifix upon the wall and the Epistles of Saint-Paul lying open on the table in the window. There Pascal sits. That faithful Martha, Gilberte Périer, has left us a very moving chronicle of his last days. She shows us her brother's utter lassitude, his charities, his long stations in the churches where relics were shown (perhaps hoping that on him, as on little Margot, a miracle might be wrought), his patience in suffering, and his invention of a very simple and practical scheme to lessen the incommodities of his neighbours. Pascal had sold his coach and horse in order to relieve, with the price of them, the sufferings of the poor :

" J'aime la pauvreté, parce qu'il l'a aimé. J'aime les biens, parce qu'ils me donnent le moyen d'assister les misérables " (fr. 550).

And now, lame, living without the gates, he knew what inconvenience endures the multitude that always goes on foot. At the same time, like many of the members and well-wishers of Port-Royal, Pascal was anxious to find some safe industrial scheme which might bring in a regular income, sufficient to provide for the Sisters and the poorer Solitaries, if, by some sudden stroke of persecution, the Abbey lands and revenues should be confiscated by Church or State, without warning and without redress.

And he thought of the omnibus ; it was his last invention. In November 1661 a deed was drawn up in the presence of a notary constituting a Company —whose shareholders were M. Pascal, the Duc de Roannez, the Marquis de Crenan, the Marquis de

Sourches, and the Marquis de Pomponne—destined to establish a service of coaches which should run regularly from point to point throughout the City and suburbs of Paris : " ce sont des coches où chacun ne payera que sa place pour un prix tout à fait modique, allant incessamment d'un quartier à l'autre." The success of this undertaking was one of Pascal's last terrestrial joys. Like many mystics he had a strong practical bent : the reckoning machine, the hydraulic press, the barometer, the low two-wheeled dray, the omnibus, the invalid's rolling-chair, all these we owe to Pascal. And all were inspired by the needs of the hour, his own or his neighbour's immediate requirements.

A long letter from Madame Périer to the Marquis de Pomponne (Simon Arnauld) gives us a lively account of the inauguration of the omnibus on March 21, 1662. The coaches started from their stations at seven o'clock in the morning " avec un éclat et une pompe merveilleuse." As they supplied a long-felt although unconscious want, they were immediately adopted by the public ; the seven coaches were not nearly enough, and the kind Gilberte deplores the situation of those who, standing at the street corner, wait for an empty seat, while omnibus after omnibus rolls by *complet.* . . . It was a new experience in city life, unimagined before that March 21st ! . . .

" Cela est fâcheux, mais on se console, car on sait qu'il en viendra un autre dans un demi quart d'heure."

But sometimes even hope deferred was doomed to frustration.

"For my part [the good lady adds], I had to wait while five went by full, and people, too long expectant, began to complain—and I myself began to be of their opinion."

I doubt if Pascal were ever well enough to make much use of this coach of his invention. It is more likely that he patronized his *vinaigrette*, the two-wheeled rolling chaise whose springs were so easy and whose motion was so gentle that it was adopted and adapted by the invalids of our English Bath. His chief pleasure in the omnibus was the money that it brought him in for his poor people. The coaches had barely begun their triumphant career before he wanted a thousand francs for some ruined farmer; and when the Loire in spate destroyed a whole quarter of Blois he again begged to have his dividends forestalled so that he might relieve the hapless families drowned out of hearth and home by the flood.

"His whole heart and all his mind were full of the poor, and sometimes he would say to me:

"'How is it that I have never yet done anything for the poor, although I have always loved poor people?'

"And I would answer:

"'You were never well enough off to have much money to give away.'

"'I might have given my time,' he would reply. 'I ought to have done so. If God grant that I get over this illness, I will have no other occupation or employment till the end of my days, save the service of the poor'" (*La Vie de Monsieur Paschal écrite par Madame Périer sa sœur*, Brunschvicg, i).

And we remember how he wrote in the *Pensées*:

"*The infinite distance that divides matter from mind shadows forth that infinitely more infinite abyss dividing mind from Charity—for this last is supernatural.*

" The grandeurs of this world have no lustre for those that seek the grandeur of the Mind.

" And that, in its turn, is invisible to kings, rich men, captains, and such as are great with carnal greatness.

" But the grandeur of goodness, which exists only in the sight of God, is invisible to the men of mind and to the men of matter. They are three Orders of being, different in kind.

" Genius has its empire, its brilliance, its grandeur, its victory, its lustre, and has no need of the kingdom of this world. Its glory is visible, not to the eyes, but to the mind ; that is enough !

" And Saints have their empire, their glory, their victory, and need no other grandeur, for mind or matter could add nothing to their being. They dwell in the sight of God, and of His Angels ; not in the sight of men, nor of curious minds : God is enough.

" Archimedes had no call to be a prince, when he wrote his books of geometry.

" Our Lord Jesus Christ had no need to be a king, to reign in the kingdom which is not of this world. . . .

" All matter : firmament, stars, Earth with its kingdoms—all that is not worth the meanest mind, which knows what it beholds, while that remains unconscious.

" All matter created, all the minds that ever thought, with all their productions, are not worth the least movement of charity. For that is of another Order, infinitely loftier.

" From the whole sum of matter, it were impossible to distil a little thought : that is impossible ; it is of another Order.

" From mind and matter and all, you never could strike out the spark of true charity ; it were impossible ; for that is of another Order, transcending that of nature " (fr. 793).

Charity, in fact, has accomplished the task that we are born to achieve : it has put in place of the natural love of Self, the Love of God.

Pascal's last illness began some two months before his death, that is to say, in June 1662. It took the form of a singular loathing for food. He was in this

week since when the child of a poor family whom Pascal had found in his house ill with of the small-pox—that terrible scourge of the seventeenth century, dreaded as the plague. In order that Madame Périer, who constantly visited her brother, should not run the risk of carrying the infection to her own children, Pascal consented to go and stay with her in the house she had recently rented in the parish of Saint Etienne-du-Mont. He was already very ill, perhaps too ill to be moved, but he remembered that he was less sick than a consumption patient in quitting his own quarters—" and so [illegible] Madame Périer, not without knowing it was my brother and not that child who was turned out of house and home."

It was so far as we can tell from his sister's account, and from Marguerite Périer's brief summary of the post-mortem, another attack of that ugly acute tuberculous peritonitis from which he had suffered on several occasions, which caused Pascal's last illness. He might have recovered from that, and taken another lease of his precious but ill-used life, even after his removal, complications arose. The doctors were not at his disposal. They are always slow in forgetting an habitual invalid.

[illegible] Périer. It was attended by a woman who what we [illegible] its close it might [illegible] as it had [illegible] struggle it [illegible] did not [illegible] a great struggle. It seemed to go [illegible] but to wait upon himself, and would not accept the [illegible] service of one [illegible]. He knew not that he was very ill, but as it had [illegible] and its life was gone, that the [illegible] as he [illegible] Still, on his fourth day in the [illegible]

moins mal," and he profited by this moment of remission to make his will. He left comfortable legacies to his servants ; to Etienne Périer's nurse ; two thousand livres to Etienne himself ; three thousand livres to the Paris Hospital ; as much to the hospital of Clermont ; and a similar sum to Jean Domat, but only for his life. Gilberte Périer was his residuary legatee and Florin Périer his executor.

In this document Pascal declares himself " bon chrétien, catholique, apostolique et romain." There can, I think, be no doubt that he hoped to die in peace with the Church.

But the doctors still thought there was little danger of his dying ; there were six of them, the first in Paris, and we still possess their prescriptions. Save an old fashion book, what is there in all the world that seems so utterly superannuated as a bundle of old prescriptions ? The doctors thought their patient suffering from melancholia, sluggish digestion, flatulence and " vapours " . . . (M. Pascal laborat infarctu viscerum, ab humore melancolico, qui humor dum fermentatur, vapores emettit, symptomata producentes varia). I have no fault to find with their diagnostic, but with their merciless treatment of so frail an invalid. These six gentlemen must have been closely related to Molière's Monsieur Diafoirus. Bleeding, purging, salts and senna, tamarind, manna, syrup of water-lilies and emetic wine ; if these could cure a poor sufferer, Pascal would have recovered. He grew very thin, but neither his emaciation, nor his pallor, nor his pains, alarmed

these kind and eminent persons : " Not a trace of danger," they assured Madame Périer.

But Pascal seemed in a sort of way happy in his illness with so many kind, affectionate persons occupied about him, who had often been so lonely in the house without the gates.

" When we pitied him, he would say that sickness and suffering were the natural state of a Christian, that it was a boon to be removed from all pleasure, exempt from passion, without ambition, without avarice, dwelling in the perpetual expectation of death. And indeed I think he really did enjoy this condition, which very few persons would have been capable of supporting."

Naturally enough, these melancholy speeches, this sad, whimsical though pious resignation, encouraged the physicians in their diagnosis. They (and M. Beurrier too, I fancy) humoured and pitied the brilliant man of genius, only just thirty-nine, whom overwork and too prolonged austerities had reduced to so sad a pass. But they did not think they were about to lose him.

One day, in an intimate conversation with his parish priest (as M. Beurrier now was), Pascal admitted that, at one time, he had been pretty deeply implicated in the party of Port-Royal. M. Beurrier was certainly not surprised, for he knew the Jansenism of the Périers, yet, even then, he did not suspect that Madame Périer's invalid brother was Louis de Montalte, the elusive, dangerous and dazzling writer of the *Provinciales*. He saw before him a candid savant, as meek and gentle as a child, as patient as a saint in his sufferings, touchingly eager to accept the consolations of the Church. Was this the firebrand of Port-Royal ?

On August 6th, the colic from which Pascal was suffering was aggravated by a most terrible headache. "Neuralgia," said the doctors. "You mistake," answered the patient, "this headache is something extraordinary." And, in fact, a very few days later they discovered in the inner lining of the skull—*not* of the brain (which appeared voluminous, serried in its convolutions and dense), but of the skull, two indentations, "the size of a finger-print," filled with clotted blood; from which some modern men of science infer the existence of a tumour of the *dura mater* (Dr. E. Roux, *Chronique Médicale*, September 1926), but it was natural that the family physicians, judging from the apparent symptoms of a nervous invalid, should consider the attack more painful than dangerous. In their eyes Pascal was a man whose condition, though certainly serious, involved a certain amount of hypochondria.

Now, feeling the end was near, he asked to receive the Sacrament, but this both the doctors and his sister strongly discouraged. In his weak state he must receive it *in viaticum*; and, according to seventeenth-century custom, when the Host was brought into a house, it was accompanied by a procession of clergy, a trooping of neighbours, much pomp and disturbance. M. Beurrier also, though willing to administer a sick man whom he admired, and in whose Catholic faith he believed, was probably not anxious to advertise the fact that he had brought the Sacrament to a notorious Jansenist, without first asking leave of his Archbishop—who certainly would have refused it, unless the penitent should

make a public profession of his acceptance of the Papal Bull. Nor, indeed, could M. Beurrier ask less : at the very least Pascal must make an utter submission. . . . And here I imagine a secret conflict : Madame Périer, still persuaded that her brother was more painfully than dangerously ill, adverse to such a hauling-down of the Augustinian flag and seeking to procrastinate ; and Pascal himself uncertain, unconvinced, dreading on the one hand to risk his soul by forswearing the truth, and, on the other, to risk it perhaps more dangerously by dying unanealed. So day by day went by without the sick man receiving the Last Supper.

On one point, at any rate, he never wavered, even when at the last he sacrificed the resistance of his individual conscience to the exigencies of the Church ; he never regretted the *Provincial Letters*, he never condoned the moral laxity that he had scourged so wrathfully, he still believed that by the miracle of the Holy Thorn Heaven had expressed its approbation. But for the rest he made a meek surrender. He told M. Beurrier that he could never recant his campaign against the Casuists, but that, as for Saving Grace, he submitted himself to the opinion of the Sovereign Pontiff. As M. Brémond has wisely observed, Pascal's fiery temperament was incapable of yielding so long as the struggle excited his combative impulses ; but, on reflection, his meditative intelligence would muse and ponder over things which no longer aroused him to wrath, and he would find some golden mean where none seemed possible. Thus one day he said to Nicole (who has recorded

this conversation in his *Traité de la Grâce*) that he misliked the harsh and obdurate tone of certain Jansenist traits :

" And M. Pascal, though the stubbornest, most inflexible man alive on all these questions of Grace, said that he hoped to render this same doctrine plausible by stripping it of a certain grim and sullen air which offended the general taste."

Well, the stiffest and most inflexible mind made its submission. Did the penitent go so far as to say one day to M. Beurrier that already, two years ago, he had somewhat withdrawn from the councils of the party " because he thought that M. Arnauld and M. Nicole went too far in these questions of Grace " ? Here I feel sure that M. Beurrier's memory betrayed him. The good priest knew little, if anything, of the inner dissensions of Port-Royal; he was unaware that his penitent had reproached his more conciliatory friends with laxity as to this very point. Pascal's extreme weakness, the priest's ignorance, account for some confusion. The penitent had owned his guilt. His absolution was not yet granted, for the Jansenists exacted a period of contrition before a sin, confessed, could be taken away. So that Pascal, growing daily weaker, had not yet received the Eucharist.

" ' Wait a while,' said Madame Périer, ' a very little while. In a few days you will be able to get up and go with me to church ; it is hard by, and we will take the Communion together at the altar-rails.'

" ' You mistake,' said Pascal. ' They do not understand my case. My headache is something quite extraordinary.'

" After a while he again broke silence :

" ' Since they will not grant me this favour, I would like to

supply its place by some work of mercy, and since I may not communicate with the Head of our Faith in the Sacrament, yet reach my Lord through the poor, who are His members. I should like to have here, by my side, some poor sick man, who should be treated in every respect as I am. For when I think how, while I am so well cared for, there are an infinity of poor persons, far more ill than I am, who lack the bare necessaries of life, then I am filled with an inexpressible pain and confusion. Engage another nurse expressly for him; and let there be no difference made between him and me. Do give me this last consolation, I beseech you! Send at once to M. le Curé and ask him to find some poor sick man.' "

The kind sister made no delay in getting the message taken to M. Beurrier; and doubtless the priest was touched; doubtless also he thought the invalid rather unreasonable, which is always supposed to be an excellent prognostic. At any rate, he sent round at once to say that he had no sick person on his list able to be moved from his bed without risk; but he promised M. Pascal that so soon as he should be a little stronger, the parish would find some poor old man for him to take care of until the end of his days, "for Monsieur le Curé had no doubt that my brother would soon be well," adds Madame Périer.

Pascal said nothing. His uneasiness increased, and the dreadful pain in his head. He then asked to be carried to the Hospital for Incurables, so that, at least, he might die among the poor. But his sister told him that no doctor would consent to let him leave his room in the state he then was in. He took this refusal so much to heart that she, poor lady, was obliged to promise that, should his condition improve, she would have him carried to the hospital.

But the pain grew worse and worse. The doctors came in consultation and diagnosed "a migraine mingled with vapours." They told the patient to try a course of buttermilk, and assured him there was not the slightest degree of danger. So little can our wisest see from without what is going on within! For the post-mortem revealed, not only that clot on the *dura mater*, but gangrened intestines with a "blight," a consumption, of both the liver and the stomach. Pascal himself had no illusions left.

One day Arnauld, from his hiding, came to see his dying friend, and was greeted with affection. Another member of Port-Royal came one other day and received the sick man's confession. All passion, all fumes of party feeling had quite evaporated from that sublime, resigned, compassionate heart.

On August 17th Pascal felt so ill that he asked his sister to arrange that a person in Holy Orders might sleep in the house that night, for he had not yet received the Sacrament. Despite the doctors' optimism, Madame Périer was so much struck by a certain look upon her brother's face that, silently, she prepared all that would be necessary for the morrow's extreme unction and *viaticum*. Pascal could not wait so long. At midnight, so violent a convulsion took him, they thought he must fall back dead. And so he seemed. But when M. Beurrier entered the room, with the Host raised in his hands, saying: "Here is He whom you have so long desired!" the sufferer recovered his senses and some degree of strength, as by a sort of miracle. He received the last Sacrament, affirmed his faith

in God, and, even as the priest gave him his benediction, exclaimed, "May God never forsake me!" which were his last words. Then, for a brief space, a dumb, unconscious form still writhed on the bed. And Pascal was no more.

Now that Pascal was dead, his greatness became almost immediately apparent, and either faction was eager to claim him for its own ; he was the glory, as he had been the brilliant apologist, of Port-Royal ; while the orthodox party in the Church published abroad their tale of a death-bed recantation.

On January 7, 1665, the Archbishop of Paris sent for M. Beurrier and asked him whether it were true that M. Pascal had died without the Sacraments ? The Curé of St. Etienne replied that, having attended his penitent during the six weeks of his last illness, having received his confession, and being persuaded of his humble submission to the Church, he had given the dying man the Sacrament *in extremis*.

The good priest had expected some rebuke when he made this answer to the formidable anti-Jansenist who was at that time Archbishop of Paris. Would he had said no more ! An interminable controversy could never have arisen. But, doubtless relieved to find his ecclesiastical superior so much less intimidating than he had feared, M. Beurrier went on to say that Pascal had once assured him "in a familiar conversation" that, during the two preceding years, he had withdrawn a good deal from the councils of

Port-Royal because he thought "ces Messieurs put themselves too much forward in the question of Grace"; M. Pascal, whose health was undermined, had chiefly cared to assure the salvation of his soul, and had undertaken a great work destined to convert unbelievers to the true faith. . . .

"Would you mind setting that statement down in writing?" asked the Archbishop.

And, in some trepidation but in all sincerity, M. Beurrier signed the report, which the Archbishop sent to Rome, whence the Jesuits diffused it widely, so that in clerical circles many rumours arose concerning the death-bed repentance and retractation of Louis de Montalte. Port-Royal (and Madame Périer) could not leave these rumours unrefuted. Pascal's sister immediately wrote to M. Beurrier, and (in a letter whose admirable sincerity and moderation can but convince the reader) explained that her brother had no need to be converted to Catholicism, since all his life he had been an excellent Catholic, and had considered his friends of Port-Royal "non seulement des personnes très-catholiques mais encore tout à fait zélées pour la défense de la morale et de la foy"; and M. Beurrier, grieved to have wounded "cette vertueuse demoiselle," answered her protestation, admitting his error and regretting a declaration which he had made too hastily and under pressure "que je souhaiterais de bon cœur n'avoir jamais donnée, puisqu'elle ne paraît pas conforme à la vérité."

But many years later, when well over eighty years of age, the Curé of Saint-Etienne retired into a fit

retreat at Versailles, and dictated his reminiscences to a secretary, or rather to several successive secretaries. And here, brooding over the great event and glory of his career—the death-bed conversion of M. Pascal—he reiterates the statement made in 1665 to his Archbishop. Can we believe him? That question still agitates the different schools of Pascalians. But one glance at Pascal's death-mask shows us how far his soul had passed from such discussions, satisfied at last with the Truth that reconciles all contraries, and received into the peace that passes all understanding.

These quarrels of Jansenist and Ultramontane are but the froth on the surface of a few centuries; when they have subsided, Pascal's glory will continue, undimmed. In the too brief span of a disabled and suffering life, he found means, not merely to enlarge the bounds of knowledge, but to leave us a collection of thoughts richer in soul-stuff than aught save the rare eternal masterpieces of the mind —thoughts which prove that, in this Order, neither abundance, perfection nor coherence is essential, but rather a certain quality, a tone of the voice, a sensitiveness quick to seize and repeat a mysterious echo of Reality which very few perceive.

INDEX

Arnauld, Angélique, Abbess of Port Royal, 88, 134, 139, 140, 142, 185–6
Arnauld, Antoine (le grand Arnauld), 42, 117, 119, 134, 140, 153, 156, 187–8, 193–4, 198, 213, 224, 226
Auzoult, Adrien, 53–5, 63–5

Beurrier, Monsieur, Curé of St. Etienne-du-Mont, 128, 219, 221–8, 227
Brémond, Abbé Henri, 193, 223
Brunschvicg, Léon, 66, 202–3

Carcavy, 96, 161, 164, 166, 174

Delfaut (Louise), Pascal's nurse, 26, 73, 178
Descartes, René, 21, 24, 34, 59–63, 67, 81, 119–20, 206
Dettonville, Amos, *see* Pascal, Blaise
Domat, Jean, 80, 82, 196, 198

Fermat, 35, 105, 174–8

Galileo, 21, 23, 24

Leibnitz, 22, 163
Louis XIV, 186, 198

Mathieu, Félix, 65–7
Mazarin, Cardinal de, 72, 146, 185–6
Méré, Chevalier de, 96–7, 137, 204–5
Mersenne, Father Marin, 20 *et seq.*, 34, 60, 76
Montalte (Louis de), *see* Pascal, Blaise

Nicole, 193–4, 201, 223–4

Pascal, Antoinette (*née* Bégon), mother of Pascal, 15, 16, 17
Pascal, Blaise, his babyhood and mysterious illness, 15–17; education by his father, 18 *et seq.*; he invents the arithmetical machine, 35; and prosecutes a plagiarist, 39; is converted to Jansenism and converts his sisters, 42–6; his first experiments on a vacuum, 48–51; he persecutes a heretic friar, 52–5; after a grave illness he returns to Paris under the charge of Jacqueline, 57; he makes the acquaintance of Descartes, 61; he joins the Périers at Clermont, 76 *et seq.*; after the experiment of the Puy-de-Dôme gives lectures on the vacuum, 80; his letter on his father's death, 83; difficulties over Etienne Pascal's will, 84–90; Jacqueline enters a convent and Pascal is disgusted with religion, 86–92; he lectures on Science and makes the acquaintance of the Duc de Roannez, 95, whose household he enters, 96; he accompanies the Duke to Poitou with the Chevalier de Méré, 96; his worldly life, 96–107; the *Discours sur les passions de l'Amour*, 100–1; his affection for the Duke's sister, 102; accident at the bridge of Neuilly, 106; Pas-

cal's vision, 110–12; he retires to Port-Royal, 116–26; he writes the *Provincial Letters*, in hiding, under a feigned name, 129–39; his god-child is cured by a miracle, 142–53; nervous disorders, 162; one wakeful night he solves the problem of the Cycloid, 162–3, and opens a competition for a prize, 164–7; a serious illness, 167, during which he writes the *Mystère de la Mort de Jésus*, 171–4; he goes to stay with the Périers in Auvergne and refuses to meet Fermat, 174–7; he returns to Paris and begins to sell his superfluities to relieve the poor, 177; he advises the nuns of Port-Royal to submit, 187; his broken-hearted resignation when Jacqueline dies, 190; posthumous influence of Jacqueline on Pascal, 192; his dispute with Arnauld and Nicole; he falls unconscious, 196; his invention of the omnibus, 213–16; his last illness, 217–26; his death, 227

Pascal, Etienne, father of the above, a remarkable man, 14 *et seq.*; he settles in Paris, 18; his taste for mathematics, 20; quarrels with Chancellor Séguier, and is banished, 25; recalled by Richelieu, 29; appointed Intendant of Rouen, 32; breaks his leg and is converted by his surgeons, 41–5; he sends in his resignation as Intendant, 72; his opposition to Jacqueline's vocation, 73–6; he joins the Périers at Clermont, 77; he gives lectures on science at Clermont, 80; he returns to Paris, 81; and dies, 83

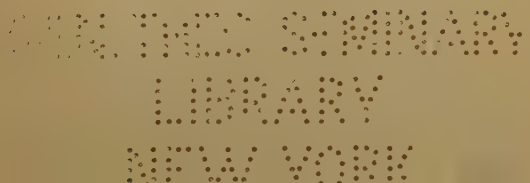
Pascal, Gilberte (sister of Pascal), *see* Périer

Pascal, Jacqueline (younger sister of Pascal), her birth, 17; falls ill of the smallpox, 27; persuades Richelieu to recall her father, 29; her letter to her father, 30; gains the municipal prize for poetry at Rouen, 37; she takes her brother to Paris and makes the acquaintance of Descartes, 61–3; her portrait, 69; she desires to enter a convent, 69–72; her father's opposition, 73–80; he takes her and Blaise from Paris to Clermont, 76 *et seq.*; after her father's death she enters Port-Royal, 86; difficulties about her inheritance, 87–90; she is sent to Port-Royal-des-Champs, 114, on a visit, and is finally established there as Mistress of the Novices, 178; she writes to Pascal, 179–80; she rises to be Sub-Prioress, 185; she refuses to sign the Formulary, 188, and remonstrates with Arnauld and her brother, 189; but is forced to sign, and dies, 189; her posthumous influence on Pascal, 190

Périer, Etienne (nephew of Pascal), born at Rouen, 38; his uncle's guest in Paris, 179; writes from Pascal's dictation, 201, 202, 220

Périer, Florin (brother-in-law of Pascal), comes to help his cousin at Rouen and marries Gilberte, 38; he makes the experiment of the Puy-de-Dôme, 75

Périer, Gilberte (sister of Pascal), marries Florin Périer, 38; is converted to Jansenism, 45; is Jacqueline's confidante, 71, 86; receives her brother in her new house at Bienassis, 174; hurries to her sister's



death-bed, 189; writes from Pascal's dictation, 201; insists on a literal transcription of the *Pensées*, 202; she records her brother's last days, 214 *et seq.*; she describes the first omnibus, 215–16; Pascal visits her in his last illness, and dies in her house, 218, 227; she defends her brother's memory, 228; her memoirs of Pascal, 46, 189–90, 216, 218, 221; her memoir of Jacqueline, 27, 37
Périer, Jacqueline (niece of Pascal), 183–4
Périer, Marguerite (niece of Pascal), the *miraculée* of the Holy Thorn, 142–7, 182, 218; her *Memoirs* of Pascal, 16, 91, 194
Petit, Pierre, 48–51

Retz, Cardinal de, 187
Richelieu, Cardinal de, 27–31
Roannez, Duke of, makes the acquaintance of Pascal and takes him to Poitou, 95–102; correspondence with Pascal, 148–50; cedes his title to his sister, 153; advises Pascal to open a competition for the discovery of the Cycloid, 162; again invites Pascal to Poitou, 176; consoles Pascal for the death of Jacqueline, 189; helps to edit the *Pensées*, 202; belongs to the company for organizing the Paris omnibus, 214
Roannez, Charlotte de, 102, 147–53, 181
Roberval, 21, 58, 62, 162

Saint-Ange, Brother, 52–5, 154
St. Cyres, 162
Singlin, M., 58, 70, 113, 157, 197, 198
Strowski, Fortunat, 17, 203, 206, 208

Torricelli, 48–9, 82, 162

Vair, Guillaume du, 34, 97

Wallis, John, 165, 166
Wren, Christopher, 165

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Duclaux, M.
Portrait of Pascal

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92
P26d